W. W. McNeill

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THE HEBREW

Oh ill-starred folk,
Beyond all others wretched! who abide
In such a mansion, as scarce thought finds words
To speak of.

DANTE

THE HEBREW

A STORY OF THE TIME

BY

JOHN A. STEUART

AUTHOR OF
"WINE ON THE LEES," "A SON OF GAD," "THE MINISTER OF STATE," ETC.

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E. E. McNeill

CHAPTER I

THE CLAMOUR OF ARMS

CONSTABLE O'RYAN, pausing on his beat to glance into Cherry Tree Court, remarked to his companion, in the bewitching Kerry tone which is made for a mouth of honey, "Gettin' up the bristle for another foight in there, sorr. Notice to quit again. Ye'd almost think they were Irish, Mr. Emmet, be the way they stick to the ould black walls."

"Almost, the poor beggars," responded Mr. Emmet, gazing down the Court with troubled eyes.

"Faith, and it's afther bein' in on the top av thim we'll be if they don't look out," said Constable O'Ryan. "And that'll be a kind av spoort widout any fun to it. I'm feared t'will be a tough job, sorr."

"If it comes to a tussle, a very tough job," Mr. Emmet owned. "As you say, Tim, the bristle's up. I think I'll just be stepping inside to see if it can't be stroked down again."

"Is it safe, sorr?" Constable O'Ryan asked in quick concern.

He loved the Rev. Percival Emmet as a brother. They were fellow patriots from the same sweet corner of Kerry. In the golden morning, which is to say the hour of boyish frolic, they had cursed Cromwell with Hibernian ardour, never thinking what they did, and roared out "Brian the Brave" together in a glorious defiance of fate. Later, when the music deepened to other meanings, one of them crooned till his eyes ran over:

Who, in the winter's night,
Soggarth Aroon,
When the cold blast did bite,
Soggarth Aroon,
Came to my cabin door,
And on my earthen-flure,
Knelt by me sick and poor,
Soggarth Aroon?

Who, as friend only met,
Soggarth Aroon,
Never did flout me yet,
Soggarth Aroon?
And when my hearth was dim,
Gave, while his eyes did brim,
What I should give to him,
Soggarth Aroon?

And the humanity and heroism of the ballad, untainted by any infection of creed, had more effect in moulding a career than tomes of chilly wisdom or maxims on duty.

The Emmets, who were landlords in a small way, had in a trying time befriended the O'Ryans, who

were tenants in a smaller way, the boys cementing friendship on the infallible principle of their age. When the time came, Destiny made one a clergyman and the other a policeman, sending both across Channel to the Saxon. For a while she let them wander apart; then unexpectedly, as her way is, brought them together in a London slum. And for old sake's sake, with many considerations beside, the giant of six feet three would joyfully have shed his last drop of blood rather than suffer a hair of the little man's head to be injured. Hence the question "Is it safe, sorr?" came straight from the heart.

"Certainly not if you came to take care of me, Tim," Mr. Emmet answered laughingly. "If they thought I mistrusted them they'd very soon give me cause. I know them."

Constable O'Ryan cast an official eye along the Court.

"I don't loike the looks av thim at all at all," he said. "They're just in the timper to misunderstand av set purpose, bad scran to thim, and I'm moidin' they're not yer own particuler people, sorr."

He looked down paternally at the figure by his side. The little man, as he well knew, was game to the last gasp of breath; but in there they'd toss him like a football if they took it into their wicked heads, and the scrimmage would be death. Constable O'Ryan had the best of reasons for putting faith in brawn, and Mr. Emmet's sole defect was that in youth he had not eaten freely enough of the Kerry

praties on which Grenadiers are reared. One might have more than a latent sympathy with the injured folk inside, but to trust them in their present mood was to confide in a cageful of snarling tigers. However, as Mr. Emmet was not to be dissuaded Constable O'Ryan could only wish him luck, and be ready in case of need.

Mr. Emmet found the Court humming viciously as a shaken hive. Men growled fiercely together in knots, women ran to and fro gesticulating in red dishevelled rage, skeleton children forgot the pinch of hunger in anticipation of the fray, which was obviously to be far more than an ordinary fight. The visitor stood within the Court-mouth and looked smilingly about. A greeting came from the other end, a deep-throated, husky bass challenge, and the crowd turned on the intruder the stare which a herd of cattle gives a stranger before attacking. The bass voice intimated they didn't "want no Gospel sharps a-spyin' on them," and suggested summary measures, of which "chucking out" was the gentlest. Mr. Emmet smiled on. He was neither surprised nor dismayed. "Chucked" and "chucked" again, told his ribs would be staved in if he ventured back, and all manner of evil done to his mutilated body, he nevertheless persevered cheerfully, to be admitted by-and-by as a friend, nay, received with open arms as a saviour. First experiences of a slum were ever the same, contumely and threats of maltreatment. As it had been elsewhere, so it

was with Cherry Tree Court. Wherefore he only smiled the more urbanely as he asked:

"What's the matter, my children?"

"Eh, wot's that? Wot's 'e a-sayin' of?" demanded the gentleman of the hoarse voice.

"'E's a callin' of us kids, that's wot 'e's a-sayin'," replied an athletic, red-faced woman, instinctively tucking her sleeves for action. Single-handed she could wallop any three parsons in London. The difficulty was to provoke them to a fight.

"Very kind of 'im, to be sure," remarked the first speaker, with an ironical guffaw. He drew nearer for purposes of investigation.

"Well! sonny, wot's brought you 'ere, eh?" he asked derisively. "Just looked in to pass the time o' day, I s'pose."

There was a roar of ribald laughter. "Look 'ere, mister," chimed in one who posed as a humourist, "ye've made a mistike. This ain't the broad road to a church: this is the narrer way to a pub, and 'scuse me for remawkin' that it don't look well for a man in a white choker to be boozin' all by 'imself. My advice is chuck it; 'tain't the thing."

Mr. Emmet beamed and nodded in absolute assent.

"Garlong!" cried another, a measly-faced youth with the prison crop still flagrant upon him, "'e ain't goin' to booze by 'imself. 'E's goin' to treat the lot, that's wot 'e's up to. Ain't 'e, sir? This wy, sir. Down this 'ere passage to the right. Pub

stands left 'and corner next turnin', and I tell 'e the swipes is good."

He made a motion of the lips as if drinking delectably.

In the laughter which followed there was not a heartier note than Mr. Emmet's.

"Things bein' as they be," put in another, "there ain't nothin' left but to drink, and the passon 'e knows it."

"Good old passon," sang several voices together; "'e ain't 'arf bad to be on the swill at this time o' day, 'e ain't. Let's get 'im to the public-'ouse."

Led by him of the deep, hoarse voice, half a dozen men and twice as many women moved forward as if to carry this gentle hint into execution, but almost at the first step they were arrested by a call of a new kind.

"Blamed! if it ain't the blessed little St. Patrick. 'Ullo, there! just be good 'n'uff to look out wot yer a-doin' of, will yer."

With these imperious words there emerged from a crumbling portal a strapping Amazon of three-and-twenty or so, the feathers in her great hat and the faded plush on her bosom quivering and throbbing with excitement. Pressing through the throng swiftly and purposefully, like one accustomed to straight going, she gripped the deep-throated leader by the arm, swung him deftly about, and marched him back to his original position. Ordinarily, in Cherry Tree Court, a man so interrupted in the

pursuit of business or pleasure would have struck and passed on over the prostrate body. Perhaps it was owing to the novelty of the proceedings, perhaps to the light in the girl's eye, perhaps to an instinctive chivalry—but now, whatever the reason, the mighty right fist did not smite.

"There ain't any sense in permiskus knockin' about, Chawley," said the arbiter, with all the force of incontestable authority. "'E's a friend of mine. 'E don't mean no 'arm, and you ain't goin' to bother 'im."

The red-faced woman with the tucked sleeves screeched in derision.

"Oh, ho! Miry's young man," she cried, with the huskiness of much gin.

The damsel's name was Miranda; but Miry was handier, and the East End seizes all opportunities to abbreviate.

"Miry's young man," pursued the other; "bloomin' curate, too, nosin' arter 'er at this time o' day; thought there'd be nobody about. Ha, ha! Chawley, 'ow can you stand it?"

Miry faced about, a red spot burning on each cheek, whipped off her hat, and laid it, feathers and all, in front of the traducer.

"Dance on it," she said, her eyes flashing, her bosom beating like a war drum. "Dance on it, and see what 'appens. 'Tain't much to ask of ye."

She drew herself up, magnificent as a flaming goddess of vengeance, set her arms akimbo, and

waited with taunting face. In a wild glee the Court instantly cleared a space, inciting the ladies to "have it out." One at least needed no such stimulus.

"Dance on it," repeated Miry; "dance on it, and get free 'air-dressin', which yer much in need of."

She ran a scornful eye over the other woman's head.

"Ain't ye goin' to crunch it up, Sal wot's yer name?" she demanded.

The Court howled in appreciation of the stinging affront offered by this ignorance of a name—which changed according to convenience.

Sal's heart tempted her to put forth a furious hand, seize that maddening mass of black hair that bobbed at her, and drag the head on which it grew into the mire. But dire experience had taught her prudence on one point, never to risk an open fight with a better woman than herself. The consequences of that folly last many days, and are hard to bear. With a strident bravado Sal retorted:

"I ain't goin' to do a double-shuffle on your old 'at so's to give ye a clime for a new un."

"Don't bother 'bout the clime," rejoined Miry tartly; "you do the dancin' and I'll face the clime."

With one voice the Court encouraged Sal, but wisely looking to results she was neither to be coaxed nor taunted into combat. With a flash of contempt and certain words which were a cause of private brooding and rankling to the challenged, Miry picked

up the hat, fixed it on her head with one thrust of a gleaming pin, and walked to Mr. Emmet.

"'Scuse me, sir," she said, her face still glowing, "but this ain't a place for you, lestways, just now. They're drunk, and they're 'oppin', and they ain't got the sense to know their friends when they sees 'em. You leave 'em alone, sir, and don't get 'urt. They ain't wuth goin' to 'orspital for, and they're goin' out 'n this, anyway."

They were old friends. He looked into the fearless eyes, and read a heart's solicitude

"No use, Miranda?" he asked.

"No, sir," Miranda replied, in a low, quick voice. "There ain't nothin' in their 'eads but bad now. They don't know you, sir, and don't understand."

At an ominous noise from behind she began to push him gently but eagerly forth.

"Don't stay, sir," she pleaded. "They're off their nuts for a row—'arf drink, t'other 'arf sunthin' wuss. Don't you stay."

He moved off, smiling at her anxiety.

"By the way, Miranda," he said, as calmly as if no fists or toes itched to maul, "I have missed you lately. How or when did you get here?"

"For the love of the Lord get out, sir," was the response. "Another time I'll tell you—there," and partly pushing, partly leading, she conducted him out into the keeping of Constable O'Ryan, who had been furtively watching lest the little man should suddenly need help.

"Faith, sorr, and it's makin' a corpse av ye they'll be some day, if ye don't look out," Tim remarked affably, drawing a long breath of relief. "A good husband to ye, my dear, for takin' care av him. He's just that careless av himself he'd walk smoilin' into a lions' den when the bastes was prickin' up for dinner."

Miry had scant respect for the police; but she knew Constable O'Ryan as a friend of Mr. Emmet, and that was enough.

"You look arter 'im now, then," she laughed, and turned to go.

"Miranda," Mr. Emmet called, "one moment. There's to be a little gathering at my place to-morrow evening. You're an old friend, and I want you particularly. You'll come?"

"Toffs?" inquired Miranda succinctly.

"Am I a man for toffs, Miranda?" Mr. Emmet answered.

"No, you ain't," she returned frankly. "Wish to Gawd all preachers was like you, sir. Yes, if I ain't crippled or killed 'fore that, I'll go."

"And bring your friend?" said Mr. Emmet.

Miry looked at him very hard.

"Chawley?" she said.

He nodded.

"Arter wot 'e's done?" she queried.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Emmet with emphasis.

The impulse of habit came upon Miry, and she laughed irreverently.

"It's a joke," said Mr. Emmet quietly. "But never mind. Get him to come."

"I'll tell 'im," returned Miry with sudden gravity. "Wot hour?"

He told her, and with an "All right, sir," Miranda plunged back into the tumult of Cherry Tree Court.

CHAPTER II

ST. EMMANUEL. FEASTING AND FASHION

WITHIN sound of London's Cathedral bell, almost within hail of the affluence which throngs her money mart, lies a tartarean region of Ishmaelites, and tribes of darkness. It is a region wherein civilisation declines to the dregs, wherein the law goes warily and not seldom in dread, wherein life is cheaper than meat and drink and raiment is less than lodging, wherein the air is poisonous and the pent heathen rage in warrens, sometimes a thousand to the acre, and, in consequence, wherein the angel of death smites with unceasing pinion.

In the midst of that deadly congestion of peril, iniquity, disaster and misery stand the church and vicarage of St. Emmanuel. How the Rev. Percival Emmet was drawn thither were too long a tale to tell. The way was devious and unexpected from the perfume and sapphire clearness of Kerry to the blighted hideousness, the sullen bale of London's inner circle. It was his own axiom that the crooks in the road of life are more than any philosopher

dreams of, and the stopping places often strange beyond the guessings of prophecy. In the parish of St. Emmanuel he shepherded twelve thousand sheep, mostly black. Being wholly devoid of drawing-rooms and smart hats, the living was hardly worth counting in a diocese that rewards her bishops with £16,000 a year and perquisites, besides dropping much delicious fatness into the mouths of lesser dignitaries. Providence had not designed Percival Emmet for the sweets of preferment. Some said that his faults were a too ready Hibernian tongue and a gift of trenchant criticism, wrongly applied. To expect patronage while speaking your mind of the patron denotes a ruinous lack of worldly wisdom. When the Vicar of St. Emmanuel criticised a bishop before all England some were shocked and some were amused; but the knowing ones figuratively made a heavy black mark against his name; for the offence was as if a soldier of the legion dared to speak presumptuously of infallible Cæsar. The Church, from Canterbury down, contracted her august brows in disapproval. She could not keep her impulsive, energetic son from having opinions of his own (his Creator was responsible there), but she could, and did, keep the family plums out of his way. Thus, while the docile and the politic received plaudits and pudding in front, he was left to fare obscurely in the rear.

To stand behind with a burning sense of fitness for the front is of all ordeals the most destructive

to the Christian grace of patience. Percival Emmet, being remarkably human, though a clergyman, had doubtless his own thoughts on the fruits of independence; but he kept them for the brooding hours when he lay awake solving problems for his ten thousand black sheep and his two thousand mixed; problems of ways and means for which churches, busy with high matters of creeds and ritual, have no time, even if Heaven vouchsafed them inclination. The great world, therefore, knew nothing of St. Emmanuel and its strivings, except when a lurid tragedy brought one of the black sheep aforesaid into the dock, and the vicar attended to look after the interests of the criminal. Then respectable God-fearing people with windpipes to save said among themselves, "How horrible, we shall never be safe till these pests and ruffians are cleared out. Why in the name of wonder are they allowed to exist?"

These edifying sentiments expressed in conformity to the law of good breeding and the instincts of self-preservation the affrighted went their several ways and presently forgot the gruesome revelations which caused them the polite shudder, nor thought any more of the baleful fermentations of the under world till another tragedy made them gasp in horror.

Left to himself in such environment Percival Emmet took his own way, according to habit; and it was a way which brought hot protests from Constable O'Ryan, Miry, and some others on the score of peril. To all he replied with the mellow

Kerry smile which won hearts like a benediction, "Providence has set me among these people; if I am to do anything for them I must be as one of themselves." And as one of themselves he was presently able to go at his ease where the detective and the bailiff and the officer of health went with qualms of shrinking. For he was not the surpliced cleric, nor the stern moralist seizing his chance with a sinner, but the friend, the brother, the physician, the man speaking to man. For the sake of religion, morality, and humanity, he was hail-fellow-well-met with the budding thief and the returned convict, with heroines who went into battle whooping and heroes who were the terror of the law. Hence he was more effective in subduing ruffianism than ten highly paid magistrates. These punished, but he conciliated. Ay, and when none saw save One who sees all, he entered the fever-stricken hovel, and went up the rotting stair, and knelt by the straw pallet or the couch of ragged sacking in the dank dark chamber where misery lies down to die. How many grimy hands he held on the brink of the black river, how many vexed spirits soothed at parting, the Recording Angel knows, but cannot be told here.

At home his own table was scantily furnished that the burning tongue of sickness might be cooled, that neglected age might be comforted, and infancy have a toy and something to eat. With their genius for expressive nick-names the people called him

"St. Patrick," and he was hardly six months in St. Emmanuel, when the phrase "As good's the blessed St. Patrick," had all the force of a proverb, and "By the blessed St. Patrick," became the most binding form of oath.

As the black sheep would not be lured within the official and appointed fold (it was idle to try the driving process), he had recourse to other methods of shepherding. Original even in his views of pastoral duty, he fed and clothed and amused. The "feasts of St. Patrick" speedily became famous, and had such potency of attraction that they drew many from the joys of the public-house. It was to one of these characteristic assemblies that Miranda and her friend were invited. Commonly the whole body of guests belonged to the parish; but on this occasion some outsiders were admitted, to wit, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, a dashing young American widow, with good looks, a fortune reckoned in millions, and a taste for picturesque philanthropy, whose acquaintance the host had made during a visit to the United States; her brother, Mr. Asaph Savoury, European partner in the great international house of Savoury and Son, bankers, of New York, London and Paris; and her *fidus achates*, Sir Sydney Dormer, an English aristocrat and bank director. They were smuggled into the banqueting-hall, a corrugated iron shed standing in a recess between the vicarage and the church; for Mr. Emmet had to be diplomatic in his modes of introducing visitors. "Say, mister, we

ain't a bloomin' menagerie for folks to stare at when we're feeding'!" a man had said in the beginning of things when fashion chanced to be rudely supercilious; and the hint was never forgotten.

Eating being a grave and arduous business within the precincts of St. Emmanuel, there was little conversation while it lasted; but as the stewards prepared the stage for the second part of the entertainment, Mr. Emmet was able to gratify the curiosity of his Mayfair friends with particulars of some of the more noted of their fellow guests. A condensed paraphrase of the descriptions must suffice here.

This gentleman with the bullet head, very closely cropped, returned home only forty-eight hours before after a two years' absence for harbouring mistaken notions of the privileges of uninvited guests who make stealthy or forcible entrance. Yes, the stout woman with the black eye next to him is his wife. She received that mark of affection exactly three-quarters of an hour after her lord's home-coming in a playful tiff over the family exchequer. Wasn't she sorry he came back? Not at all. On the contrary, she was delighted to see him, and in her heart is really proud he has not forgotten the old sociable habits nor lost the old sleight of hand. She will bear further marks of affection before twelve hours pass. This other gentleman, with the foxy face and the furtive eyes, has the distinction of being the cleverest jewel thief in London. As with all children of genius, his dæmon is at times too much

for him. Would Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, therefore, look to her gems and precious stones!

That slip of a girl near the back recently faced the law for pocket-picking, and in the dock picked the pocket of the guardian who stood beside her, a pretty feat which gave rivals a thrill of envy. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy breathed quickly until she remembered fashion left her no pockets to be picked. Yonder youth, with the well-anointed head and the forelock curled over his eyes, is the promising leader of a band of hooligans. They could see the belt-buckle gleaming at his waist. To Mr. Emmet's knowledge that buckle had knocked three men senseless within ten days.

"The young rascal," said Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, crinkling her brows. "What did you do?"

"Said I'd have to be telling his old mother if he didn't mend. He promised to consider the matter if it were made worth his while, and he's here investigating. I hope he won't be disappointed and knock somebody's brains out on the way home by way of revenge."

The distinguished-looking individual in the corner with the huge ears and the aggressive jowl wore the broad-arrow for ten years, because of a sportive freak which an illiberal law construed as manslaughter; and the man next to him, likewise with a striking countenance, stood his trial on the capital charge and came off unscathed, though moral certainty was dead against him. His wife, the lady

hard by, last month fought two policemen, and, it was confidently said, would have conquered but for the untimely arrival of reinforcements. As it was, her gallantry gave one of them a week in hospital. Others of her sex, grouped round in amiable talk, are equally celebrated, were there time to unfold their records.

Of a different type is the creature shrinking dejectedly at the back as if trying to evade observation.

"Don't look too hard at the poor fellow," Mr. Emmet whispered. "He's not brazen, like most of the rest, and it hurts him to be noticed. Would you believe that a few years ago he was the boast of a great university and fast making a name as a scholar and divine?"

"Gracious," ejaculated Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, "and what in the world brought him here?"

"A leveller as great as death itself, what, alas! has brought many another good man here, drink. Only two months ago I went to see his dying mother and his heartbroken father about him; and I shall never forget that scene. Poor old mother, going down to the grave in sorrow because her cherished and brilliant boy was here." His lip quivered. "He was, he is brilliant. I wouldn't open my mouth in any matter of brains or learning if he were present, and you see him."

"Can't anything be done?" Mrs. Cadwallader Roy asked, with a thrill of pity and horror.

"We're trying," was the answer; "but hope is not

strong. Once in the slums, always in the slums, is too true a saying. It would have rent your heart to hear his mother pleading that her boy might be saved while the cold dews were already on her own brow. Ah! madam, these are the wrecks which the makers and vendors of drink strew along their course; these are the submerged records of their prosperity. I wanted to take him to the funeral, but he cried out in an agony, 'No, no, my God, no; it would be intolerable. I couldn't bear it.' On the day he borrowed half-a-crown, and slunk off to a public-house to drown the thought of her he had killed. He's a Bachelor of Divinity, an honour man in Moral Philosophy, if you care to discuss religion and the soul with him."

Mrs. Cadwallader Roy shivered.

'How terrible! and his name?"

"Ah! that's a secret. I knew him a full year before I discovered it. Then my discovery came about by chance, and he made me swear never to divulge it. 'I'm lost in the Inferno now,' were his words. 'Let me be.' I ask you to think a moment what it means to him to be here."

"And I suppose he's not by any means the only good man gone wrong in this crowd?" remarked Asaph.

"Unfortunately, he is not. There are others here, and all round us, brought down from high places by drink, plus folly, plus misfortune, plus this and plus that—but always there is the fatal factor of

drink. Within a few months there have come to us a celebrated classic of Oxford, a wrangler from Cambridge, a physician from the West End, and from the city one who was once spoken of as a coming Lord Mayor."

"And the women?" inquired Asaph.

"Let us be thankful that the angels have not all fallen, that Heaven is still inhabited," was the reply. "Well, Tim?"

Constable O'Ryan, who was off duty, and a steward, came to say that all was ready, if the quality would be pleased to take their seats on the platform.

The audience, simmering in the best of good humour, called gaily on Mr. Emmet for a speech; but instead he gave a song, a dewy lyric of his own land, "Eileen Aroon." A rapt hush fell as he sang, and before he ended wastrels and scarred brigands hung like cherubs on the words of innocence and love.

Youth must with time decay,
Eileen Aroon!
Beauty must fade away,
Eileen Aroon!
Castles are sacked in war,
Chieftains are scattered far,
Truth is a fixèd star,
Eileen Aroon.

The rapture of devotees, deep-chested and heavy-footed, was in the greeting to that sentiment of Truth. Enthusiasm took another turn when Timothy O'Ryan followed with "Lanigan's Ball," a gem of

conviviality which tickled all hearts. Then a volunteer rendered, with inimitable touches of realism, an original sketch, "Skilly and Plank-bed; or 'Ow it feels to be lagged," the audience evincing a subtle and enlightened appreciation by means of sundry noddings, chucklings, nudgings, and grimacings. The piece very plainly went home. More songs brought more applause; and then, quite unexpectedly, Miry's friend rose at the back of the hall. In response to the demand for a speech, he modestly intimated that he wasn't "much on the stump"; it didn't happen to be in his line. But he had enjoyed himself beyond measure, and with their permission would, in return, try to add something to the gaiety. With that he wiped his mouth, moistened his lips, contorted his face, and began to whistle. First he whistled a plain air, which he repeated with many and wonderful variations; then he broke off into a new air, rising, falling, floating among grace notes as if his very soul were music and he must express its passion or die. Changing again, he cooed mournfully as a dove bereft of its mate; then rose, piping like a lark in June. Next came a thrush's gushing ecstasy on a spring morning, to which succeeded the cosy warbling of a canary by the domestic hearth. The finale was a fantasia representing the assembled song-birds of the whole earth; and when he finished, the detonation of applause nearly blew away the corrugated roof. Waiting blandly until the uproar died, the artist

called out to Mr. Emmet, "If ye want any more of that sort of thing, sir, at these 'ere festive gatherin's ye know where to get it," and plumped down, whereupon there arose another peal. While it rang and reverberated, Mr. Emmet asked O'Ryan if he knew aught of the man. "Oh, yes, sorr," Tim answered with a grin, and whispered something which made Mr. Emmet stare in a kind of quizzical gravity.

CHAPTER III

MIRY AND HER FRIEND THE WHISTLER

MIRY'S friend was presently brought forward with other choice spirits and introduced to the quality as Pickens, Charles Pickens. His calling in life, about which Mr. Emmet had inquired of Constable O'Ryan, was not stated. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy surveyed him with the dainty, shrinking interest, compounded of horror and fascination, which she might bestow on a cannibal admitted for a moment (under proper keeping) for the amusement of the civilised. Reciprocally, Mr. Pickens's interest was less keen. The truth is, he rarely troubled himself with ladies, great or small. There was no need, the law of supply and demand, so far as he had tested it, being all in his own favour.

His attention was now almost wholly for Mr. Emmet, and seizing the first opportunity, he remarked with unwonted sheepishness, "I 'ope, sir, as you won't go and take on 'bout wot 'appened in Cherry Tree Court yesterday. 'Ow was I to know you wasn't one of the or'nary sort of Gospel snipes that

slings 'is faults at a feller as if they was paid by the job? Ye can't allus tell from a man's outside wot 'e's up to, or guess from 'is 'at wot's a-passin' in 'is 'ead, can 'e, sir?"

"I should think not," laughed Mr. Emmet.

"Lor' bless 'e, and a jolly good thing too for some people," pursued Mr. Pickens, recovering his customary robustness of tone. "All I say is, it's lucky for some folks there's a place in this world for all sorts, purtenders, hypicrits, good, bad, and the rest. If there wasn't, some I know would be goin' on short allowance, I can tell 'e. Well! I didn't know wot sort you was, sir, and of course I 'ad to go and act like a blind moke on the batter. But you're one of the right sort, sir, you are."

"Thank you," said Mr. Emmet, greatly diverted by the testimonial.

"S'elp me Bob," rejoined Mr. Pickens fervently, "Miry told me all about you arter you left yesterday, and now I seed for myself. I tell 'e wot it is, sir: if some of them nice fellers that's dyin' to reform us coves took your plan of startin' with vittals they'd get along a 'eap better, I know. If you arsk me, 'ungry people ain't just in the best frame of mind for listenin' quiet and takin' the account of their sins to 'eart, be they, sir?"

"I daresay not," returned Mr. Emmet.

"You take my word, they ain't. Peckishness ain't exactly the kind of soothin' syrup to swallow yards of sour talk on, and feel jolly arter it. Now, sir,

you done the right thing—started fair with sunthin' to eat."

"And you feel like a good Christian?" said Mr. Emmet.

"Let's put it that way," responded Mr. Pickens, drawing the back of his great hand across his mouth. "But 'tweren't of the grub I wanted to speak. You've been and done the square thing," he went on, bending a little closer. "Stid of chuckin' me out arter makin' a muff of myself and insultin' you 'fore the crowd, you arsked me round 'ere."

"Never mind that," said Mr. Emmet.

"Oh! I dessay as you ain't much accustomed to grace arter meat. I dessay as ye gets lots of sauce that sets the teeth on edge. Dessay as there's times when ye kind o' forget 'ow perlite words sound. That don't matter. 'Tain't no 'scuse for me; and bein' sort of vexed 'bout my own foolishness, I thought I'd just say this. Don't you be goin' near Cherry Tree Court. Let it alone. Don't you play sailor and mad bull with it. We ain't saints in there, best o' times, and we're sunthin' under fustclass humour now 'cos of wot's 'appenin'. There's times, too, when we don't know our own friends when we sees 'em; that's a fact 'cordin' to the truth told us by Miry yesterday. Don't you trust us, sir. We're a rummy lot when the fur's raised, we are."

The counsel was given sincerely and seriously. Mr. Pickens knew the slums as even Mr. Emmet did not know them. Moreover, his training and

vocation made him an expert in character-reading; and he divined instantly that the vicar's fearlessness and zeal were a clear danger. Even he who admonished might be forced against his conscience to prove his words if the warning went unheeded.

"And if I promise to keep out of Cherry Tree Court will you promise to come back and see me here?" Mr. Emmet asked.

Mr. Pickens considered a moment.

"I ain't allus in town," he answered thoughtfully. "At times I've got to go into the country."

Constable O'Ryan, chancing to come up behind at the moment, heard the remark, and grinned as at a jest of profound significance. In the same instant Mr. Pickens turned and looked into the face of the law in mufti. He had almost ejaculated "tec" before he remembered that the occasion was privileged and friendly. Quick as light he recovered.

"'Ow goes it, matey?" he said in beaming affability. "'Tain't onct in a week of Sundays we've the pledger of meetin' you around the 'orspitable board. Glad to meet private and sociable." He grinned in spite of himself. "Well! be good, and you'll be 'appy, as the judge said to the man that was to be 'anged. Ta, ta. Much 'bliged, sir," he added, turning again to Mr. Emmet. "'Ope as ye won't forget wot I said."

"Be sure I won't," said Mr. Emmet.

"Goin' 'ome, Miry?" Mr. Pickens sang out in the next breath, interrupting Miranda in an animated

conversation with Mrs. Cadwallader Roy and Sir Sydney Dormer.

"Arter a while," Miry replied. "You needn't bother waitin'."

"Oh! 'tain't any bother, Miry," Mr. Pickens assured her gallantly.

"Don't you wait," she said decisively. "I ain't sure when I shall be ready."

There were distinct signs of disappointment in Pickens's face, but pretending undimmed gaiety, he went off with his friend, the author of "Skilly and Plank-bed." When nearly all the others were gone, Mr. Emmet and Miry had a little private talk.

"Tell me about your friend, Miranda," he said.

"Oh! he ain't any friend of mine," Miry replied, colouring as if bashfulness were a common weakness in the East End. "Lestways, not now."

"Was," said Mr. Emmet.

"Might a' bin," corrected Miry.

"So," said Mr. Emmet meaningly.

Miry looked very hard at the floor for a moment, kicking something invisible with her toe. Then lifting her head she said abruptly:

"Good night, sir. Mind my takin' a bun to a 'ungry kid I know?"

Nearly all her own share of the feast was stuffed into her pocket for distribution in Cherry Tree Court.

"Take as many buns as you like, or anything else you can find or carry," was the response. "Who is your friend? what does he do for a living?"

"Var'us things," replied Miry vaguely.

"What in particular?"

"I could tell 'e," was the reply, made with a straight look, "but you're the last man, sir, to want me to peach, and I'm the last woman to do it. 'E's nothin' to me now; can't be, arter wot I've learned from you, sir. But all the same 'e ain't a bad sort at 'eart. I've knowed 'eaps of 'em wuss'n Chawley, in collars and cuffs,—yes, sir, 'eaps callin' 'emselves gen'lemen that wasn't fit to wipe 'is boots."

She spoke with the emotion of one in whose breast old memories and feelings are suddenly revived.

"But wot chance 'as 'e got?" she continued, following the bent of hot thoughts. "Wot chance 'as any of us got? or wot's the use of livin', anyway? I dunno wot most of us was born for, 'cept to be kicked about and 'ave our bones picked."

"Miranda," he broke in, "you must not talk like that."

A thousand times he had heard that cry of affliction, and spoken in reproof—vexed and depressed over his own miserable inability to give effective aid. Why, why were things suffered to go as they did? Why was it that he helped men and women up, only to see them knocked down again and ground till the weak died and the strong broke into red rebellion, and all alike lost hope and faith? To expound the gospel of brotherhood or talk of a Father's care seemed, in the murky confusion of

evil, a gratuitous irony, a cruel jest to heart and reason. Had God turned away from them in anger? Were this place and people delivered for a perpetual prey to Moloch and his spoilers? It almost appeared there could be but one answer. Yet the vicar's duty was to inculcate cheerfulness, and urge the bleeding and the maimed to look on the bright side of things.

"There ain't any bright side s'far's I can see," Miry told him gloomily. "It's all dark. I try and try to do as you tell me, sir, cos I know you're good—the best I've ever knowed."

"Miranda," protested Mr. Emmet, as if an arrow had pierced him.

"I ain't a liar," rejoined Miry firmly, "and—there, sir—" she broke off, "your friends is a-waitin' for you. Good-night, sir. Don't you be a-comin' to Cherry Tree Court. Blood's goin' to run there for sure."

"Bid my friends 'good night,' Miranda."

"'Scuse me, sir, but I ain't got the 'eart—and that's a fact," with which she turned and walked swiftly away, though Mrs. Cadwallader Roy was waiting and ready to be gracious.

CHAPTER IV

ENTER MR. ISRAEL HERSTEIN, EXIT CHERRY TREE COURT

MIRY and Pickens were right, as was usually the case in judgments of their own kind. Cherry Tree Court, blazing as with nitre and terebinth, was certainly in no humour to receive with gratitude any blessing which the Rev. Percival Emmet was in a position to bestow. For the spirit of progress had decreed that it should be eliminated off the face of the earth as an abomination unfit for a Christian land, a plague spot which caused Madam Hygiene and her satellites to hold their classic noses every time they passed that way, and therefore no longer to be tolerated. In characteristic fashion Cherry Tree Court retorted it could not see what Madam Hygiene and her satellites had to do with its dilapidation or evil odours so long as it paid its rent, buried its dead at its own expense, and made no complaint. It pointed out volubly, by the mouths of tragic women, that lairs of some sort are as necessary for men as for beasts. People must sleep

and eat somewhere ; would Constituted Authority, in the goodness of its heart and the profundity of its wisdom, consider that elementary fact, especially since the petitioners had nowhere else in all the world to lay their heads? Thus, for the first time on record, Cherry Tree Court tried moral suasion and regretted the experiment.

For it chanced that Constituted Authority had just then a spasm of reforming zeal, because an enlightened, which is to say a fashionable, public opinion insisted, heedless of consequences, that the huddled children of darkness should have light, decency, sanitation, and the regulation number of cubic feet of air-space per head. Wherefore Cherry Tree Court, as a foul and pestilent sink, was peremptorily ordered to clear itself out by a certain date, on peril of being bundled bag and baggage into the open street, where presumably conditions of light, decency, sanitation, and air-space were satisfactory.

Now Cherry Tree Court, having found moral suasion a farce, wickedly took counsel with its disreputable self to frustrate the beneficent intentions of reformers, and resenting with particular bitterness the idea of that well-ventilated habitation in the street, promptly mobilised for war. Thereupon the law, in the persons of a police inspector, two sergeants, Constable O'Ryan, and half a squad of comrades, appeared, demanding unconditional surrender. Being answered with contumely by fierce-eyed men behind barricades and women stripped and tucked for the

fray, the besiegers sent for reinforcements. A battle, with confused noise and garments rolled in blood, ensued ; and at length the law, considerably damaged and savage in consequence, passed through breaches and splinters and over fallen bodies to clear the captured fortress. Furniture came out of upper windows, childhood and old age tumbled helter-skelter down the dark stairs, moaning or crying, and frantic men and women gathering their torn clothes about their wounds and bruises cursed Constituted Authority and its myrmidons with curses which curdled the blood of Constable O'Ryan even while he mopped a streaming brow. Firing thus in Parthian fashion, the defeated withdrew to pack themselves in back yards and slimy cellars, there to prepare for other fights, swell the rates, and incidentally breed disease.

" Pore divils," remarked Constable O'Ryan pityingly to Mr. Emmet, " Pore divils. 'Minds me of evictions in Ireland, sorr, only worse."

But the law cannot afford sentiment. It had been ordered to clear Cherry Tree Court, it had done its duty, and to render that duty permanently effective it nailed up doors and windows, and set Constable O'Ryan, with six others as stalwart as himself, to guard approaches, lest the dispossessed should try to rush the position and swarm back to their holes.

With that a great stillness fell upon Cherry Tree Court, such a stillness as it had never known in the whole course of its chequered existence, the stillness

of evacuated ruins. Constable O'Ryan yawned as he looked at the blind windows and lifeless doors and deserted pavements, wondering when the "housebreakers" would arrive to relieve him.

They were due, indeed, and overdue, but they did not appear. In their stead there issued on the scene, incognito, and unexpectedly, as if stepping out of the inane, one Israel Herstein, suavely inquiring into defects, shrewdly making calculations, and, through an intermediary, persuasively conducting interviews with Constituted Authority and a company of small landlords left by a freak of public philanthropy with the carcass of a white elephant on their hands. We need not follow the negotiations. Declaring on his honour he was aghast at his own folly, Mr. Herstein bought the yawning blankness of desolation, from its broken roofs to its battered pavement. Then he called unto him workmen cunning in repair, who patched a little, plastered a little, plumbered a little, varnished a little, whitewashed a little—in a word, did many marvels in little. All that accomplished, he invited Constituted Authority, by proxy, and, as it were, with a seraphic smile and a gesture of both hands, said rapturously, "There!" Almost as rapturously Constituted Authority replied, "Marvellous; could not have believed it possible." Certain official acts followed swiftly; and by the magic of the pen astutely guided, Cherry Tree Court disappeared from the map of London, and in its stead blossomed Beulah Place, so named

because, said Mr. Herstein pleasantly, "it hath a sweet savour." When the doors were reopened house-hungry people crushed in at double the old rents and a flagrant disregard of regulation cubic-space. Thus do old things become new, and well-devised acts of folly yield cent.-per-cent. in coin of the realm—under the benevolent eye of Constituted Authority.

By a striking coincidence it chanced that about the same time the financial press of London announced that Mr. Israel Herstein was elected to a seat on the Board of the Standard Metropolitan Bank in room of a distinguished peer, translated, his brother directors regretted to say, to spheres where men cease to trouble about loans and dividends.

Mr. Herstein smiled over the announcement complacently as he had smiled over the extinction of Cherry Tree Court and the rise of Beulah Place. If only quidnuncs and busybodies knew. Ah! if they only knew, what spicy gossip might regale silken dovecots. His mind went back to the day on which a certain youth shook the dust of a foreign ghetto off his aspiring feet and set his face resolutely towards the New Jerusalem, which is to say the capital of the world; also to the night on which a certain alien immigrant, ignorant alike of English speech and English ways, was taken in by a Jewish Board of Guardians on the banks of the Thames. Wondrous things had come to pass since. But for

the mercy of God, his own unerring sagacity, and the simplicity or folly of mankind, he might have become a Schnorrer, a beggar of the British Ghetto, which is many degrees worse, climatically and otherwise, than that of Venice or Berlin. He might even have been dolorously crying "Ou clo', ou clo'," up and down Gentile streets. But praised be the Lord, he was a director of the Standard Metropolitan Bank, a typical English institution, with a dominating power in the City, and a dazzling connection in the West End: ay, that and much beside. He held out a massive right fist, crooked like a vulture's talons, to seize and hold. Gold and precious stones gleamed upon its fatness now, but the time was not so far past when it had been grimy with toil. He closed it with a clinch of iron—there was the secret—tenacity. The British bull-dog is tenacious, but hooks of steel are more tenacious still; and the steel hook method was Mr. Herstein's; what he caught he held.

The position of bank director was chosen with the infallible judgment which distinguished all Mr. Herstein's business doings. He might have been on other Boards earlier, but when invitations reached him he declined with such evident sincerity that his friends expostulated, declaring a pestilent modesty was spoiling him. Mr. Herstein merely smiled. He knew better than many counsellors. In the welfare of Israel Herstein no mortal alive was so deeply concerned as Israel Herstein himself, nor

understood with half his clearness what Israel Herstein wanted. So he waited with that persistent patience which is the true alchemy in turning common things to gold. When asked why he accepted his present directorate after refusing others he replied, "Well, you see, the beesiness of the Standard Metropolitan is altogether in London: that suits me." Whereupon it was remarked that undoubtedly he was one of the genuine sons of Jacob.

To his fellow-directors Mr. Herstein was clear as sunlight, ingenuous as a child, up or down to a certain point. Beyond that he was thick darkness. That he was rich they knew; but whence he derived his riches or what his calling in life was, save the eating of directorial luncheons, the pocketing of directorial fees, and the receiving of handsome dividends, no man in the Standard Metropolitan could tell, and Mr. Herstein did not choose to unbosom. There were many guesses which need not be recounted here. All his colleagues knew with certainty was that he was wealthy, astute, sleek, suave, low-voiced, inclining to plumpness, or by'r-lady to corpulency in the region of the waist, and an expert in cutting expenses.

On a day not long after his election, Mr. Herstein was drawing near the end of his directorial luncheon, when a porter announced that his carriage was waiting below.

Swallowing a glass of wine, he rose, begging to

be excused for a haste that was extremely uncharacteristic of a bank director at luncheon time, and descended to his landau and pair of superb greys. On the box was a solid English coachman, on the curbstone a smart English lackey, and in the landau a young lady with the Oriental profile and the gleaming hair of the daughters of Judah. As the carriage started, Mr. Herstein pulled out his watch.

"You have come ten minutes too soon," he said regretfully, "and the lunch is free, Rachel."

"I am sorry, father," Rachel responded dutifully; "but Jones came faster than I expected. I suppose the streets happened to be free from blocks."

"Just so," said Mr. Herstein, thinking of what he had lost by his coachman's zeal in driving. "Jehu-ben-Nimshi," he murmured, looking at the spacious British back in front of him. "I wish, Rachel, that the Gentile dogs did not drive my horses. But our race is not a race of horsemen; we must be patient. Shones takes my pay, but his heart is not with me. He is like unto him who shot the arrow into his master Jehoram, King of Israel. I mistrust the whole brood of the uncircumcised. Their hand is everywhere against us; but as the Lord liveth they shall not prevail, because," he lowered his voice, "because—Rachel, the Gentile is a proud fool."

Jehu Jones headed eastward, driving at a round pace. Presently he drew up at a street corner, and Mr. Herstein alighted.

"I have much beesiness to-day, Rachel," he said

from the pavement. "You need not come back for me. Have you anything to do now, my child?"

"A little shopping, father," Rachel replied, fluttering a lace handkerchief charged with costly perfume.

"Ah! yes," he said, but not grudgingly, for the joy of Israel Herstein's soul was to see his daughter, the apple of his eye, shining in splendour among the vauntful Christians. "Ah! yes, very good. All right, Shones. Drive carefully, and not so fast, Shones, not so fast."

He watched until the carriage disappeared; then turning quickly, walked down a side street, until he reached a gloomy pile of buildings, let out in yet gloomier offices. A moment he paused to glance about him, like one who would avoid observation; the next he passed swiftly within. At the end of a tunnel-like passage he pushed open a door, entering abruptly upon three lean, thread-bare clerks of the Hebrew persuasion, who were bent over books and papers. At a sign of command the chief of the three followed into an inner room and carefully shut the door.

"Well," said Mr. Herstein, wheeling purposefully. "Is everything ready?"

The answer was to the effect that all was ready, pending the arrival of an indispensable gentleman named Meckles.

Mr. Herstein looked at his watch.

"Meckles is due at 2.30," he said. "It is now 2.20. He will not be late."

With that he began to pull off his coat, remarking, as he performed that operation, "Chartin, they do not like frog coats in Beulah Place. Funny people the English."

"Yes, sir," Chartin agreed: "very funny."

"Yes, indeed, Chartin, very funny. Frog coats for Peecadilly, but not for Beulah Place. Neither do they like seelk hats there," laying aside the glossy headgear meant for the West End and Board meetings. "Tell me, Chartin," he went on, shooting out a shapely leg, "do you theenk that the trousers will do?"

Wishing in his heart that he had a pair of similar cut and material, Chartin replied that having Bond Street writ all over them, they might conceivably arouse antipathies in Beulah Place, which it was well known harboured prejudices against fashions other than its own.

"Very well," said Mr. Herstein amiably; "we will change them too."

He took from a wall cupboard a pair less calculated to excite envy, which he presently put on, adding upper garments designed in consonance with Alsatian modes. Then, having unearthed a rusty bowler with a broken brim, he deposited his gold watch and chain in a safe, taking thence a German-silver timepiece, of the able-bodied, lusty-voiced, Clerkenwell species, worth intrinsically a round three-and-six.

"One can't be too careful, Chartin," he remarked agreeably, locking the safe and putting the key in

his pocket. For they snatched and ran about Beulah Place, the ill-conditioned varlets, giving a heavy-footed police no chance of recovering stolen property. Mr. Herstein added, with a facetious smile, that "Brevention is cheaper than cure."

These arrangements were scarcely completed when iron knuckles sounded peremptorily on the door, and without waiting for an invitation the indispensable Meckles entered.

CHAPTER V

TROUBLES OF THE FAITHFUL

INSTANTLY the atmosphere quivered with a new force, an aggressive, thundery force that would not be trifled with. And, indeed, the whole truculent visage, with the Bardolphian nose set like a red knob on a purple ground, said as plainly as features could that any liberty with the owner would be taken in a manner likely to be remembered by the offender, and that such as expected any gush or gruel of sentiment had better go elsewhere for the article. Mr. Herstein beamed on the new comer in pleasure.

"Ah! Meckles," he said, "punctual, as usual."

"Yes," responded Meckles; "said I'd be here sharp at 'arf-past two, and 'ere I am."

Mr. Herstein rubbed his hands in satisfaction.

"Here you are, Meckles. Here you are. And beesiness, Meckles, how is beesiness?"

"Oh! we try to keep business all right," replied Meckles. "But there's some people whose aggravatin' ways would make Old Nick himself cuss. What d'ye think? Third back floor, No. 17, has gone and

hanged himself; as if we had nothin' to do but mess about with dead corpses! Yes, and more'n that he lays out his last copper on a new rope. Old rope wasn't good enough, I s'pose."

His tone implied ineffable disgust with the extravagance, the unjustifiable extravagance of a poor man in presuming to hang himself with a new rope when an old rope would have served equally well.

"It's quite true that them who can least afford it are most wasteful," said Meckles, with the indignation of an outraged apostle of thrift.

"Did he owe any rent, Meckles?" Mr. Herstein asked fearfully.

"Seven-and-six," replied Meckles.

A spasm of pain wrung Mr. Herstein's countenance.

"Oh! these rogues," he cried. "These rogues. Hanging himself without paying his rent! It is deeshonest. Meckles, can the law do anything?"

"Bury him," returned Meckles laconically. "'Bout all the law will do with a corpse, 'cept messin' round tryin' to find out what he went and killed himself for. If I had my way I'd sell 'em to be cut up at the 'orspitals, that's what I'd do; and the man who went and hanged himself owing a week's rent would know jolly well it'd be took out of him. However, third floor back, No. 17, wasn't just so smart's he thought. He forgot to clear out his sticks, and, of course, I've seized 'em."

Mr. Herstein drew a deep breath of relief, as Meckles read a list of articles from a greasy note-

book. It included an iron bed, a table on three legs, a sack stuffed with mouldy straw on which two "kids" pretended to sleep, a damaged beer jug, a damaged teapot, and various other "sticks," sufficient, Mr. Meckles thought, for the debt of seven-and-six.

Mr. Herstein beamed again, in frank admiration of his lieutenant. Men who fraudulently hanged themselves were greatly mistaken if they thought they could circumvent Meckles. The great man glowed genially over his own perspicacity in choosing such an agent. The appointment had not been made rashly, for the duties were arduous and responsible. Several failures preceded Meckles. His immediate predecessor had been summarily dismissed for permitting an infuriated Amazon of Beulah Place to maul him within an inch of his life. A yet earlier holder of the office had come down head foremost three flights of stairs, and being found at the bottom unable to give a coherent account of himself, or, in fact, any account at all, was naturally discharged as unfit for duty. A third took French leave one evening, with a week's rents; and the ingratitude cut Mr. Herstein to the quick. No such dereliction or defection stained the record of Tom Meckles. He undertook to deal with certain quarters where honesty was at a heavy discount, and he kept his engagements to the last jot and tittle.

"Ah! that is good," said Mr. Herstein, smiling over the latest instance of his zeal. "I hope there wasn't much trouble, much noise."

"Widow blubbered and went on a bit," answered Meckles, as if that sort of foolishness were to be expected from widows. "And the kids howled and carried on pretty bad. That was all. They're out, and the place relet at ten bob."

Mr. Herstein made a rapid calculation.

"That is 33⅓ per cent. advance," he said with gusto. "Meckles, that is good beesiness, excellent beesiness, Meckles."

"'Tain't all beer and skittles, I can tell ye," returned Meckles, and went on to report other trials and vexations of the faithful in dealing with craft and wickedness. It seemed that the whole portion of slumdom under the government of Meckles had entered into a villainous league and covenant to defraud, harass, irritate, and resist just claims and measures. Few were, indeed, so spiteful as to imitate the criminal of No. 17. The law declares explicitly that in no conceivable circumstances has a man any legal right to hang himself, whether his object be merely to get rid of life or more seriously to leave his creditors in the lurch, and that he had better not let it catch him trying such tricks. Messrs. Herstein and Meckles would not restrict the liberty of the individual in a matter of life and death, provided he paid up; but they held it was infamous in any one to "swing" on a Saturday night without making any provision whatever for the rent. Happily, Beulah Place, as a whole, had probity enough to pause at the rope and the iron staple in a wall that would

scarcely hold. But wickedness has many devices short of suicide, and Beulah Place and streets associated with it appeared to indulge in them all. Yet Meckles was incongruously glad as he gave an account of his stewardship; while Mr. Herstein listened in undisguised happiness.

"Good beesiness, Meckles," he would observe at intervals. "Good beesiness." And contrary to reason and logic, these exclamations of satisfaction were heartiest when the tale of tenants' heinousness was blackest.

"Meckles, the English people are a great beeg puzzle," he remarked finally, with a smack of relish denoting that the great beeg puzzle suited him exactly, and that if the English people had to be made over again he really could not suggest any improvement. "Yes," he repeated, "God made them a beeg, beeg puzzle. Tell me, Meckles, is this all right?" He put on the rusty bowler and cocked his head roguishly at Meckles.

That gentleman cast a critical eye over his employer.

"All right, I fancy," he replied.

"Nothing of the West End in that, Meckles," said Mr. Herstein, assuming the attitude of a man posing for his tailor.

"Nothing," Meckles owned. "Nothing whatever."

"They don't like frog coats and seelk hats round about Beulah Place. Can you tell me why, Meckles?"

"Yes," returned Meckles promptly. "I can; but

it ain't worth while. Beulah Place has got to take what it gets and be thankful. But it's a fact they don't like top hats. T'other day a topper got lost there, and was bashed in two twos. Cove that owned it called a copper. 'Tain't fit for much now, and that's a fact,' says the copper, takin' out his everlastin' note-book. 'Truth is, sir, they can't stand that sort of headgear round 'ere.' 'Oh, can't they?' says the cove that owned the hat, gettin' mighty red in the face; 'd'ye think I'm goin' to stand this sort of treatment?' says he. 'Ere's my card, and I'll expect to hear from you when you've ketched 'em. I'll make 'em go ba-ba for this,' says he, 'if it costs me the price of three hats.'"

Mr. Herstein laughed in ridicule.

"The beeg fool," he cried. "The beeg, beeg fool. Come, Meckles, let us go."

Four times a year, that is to say on each recurring quarter-day, save when it happened to be the Jewish Sabbath, in one of the many disguises open to gentlemen of resource who do not wish to attract attention, Mr. Herstein made a studious round of his property; and twice in each year he made a special inspection with a view to the semi-annual increase of rent in the case of tenants of more than six months' standing. With the trusty Meckles he was now setting forth on the second of these missions.

CHAPTER VI

HUSBANDRY AND A LESSON TO LAW BREAKERS

UNDER the fostering care of Mr. Herstein and his talented lieutenant Beulah Place developed some of the qualities which men of the world prize most highly. It had ten thousand faults, an infinite number of vices, and leanings to crime which made it notorious in criminal courts. Its zeal in wickedness spoiled the temper of judges and magistrates; it covered itself with a dazzling infamy when the black flag ran up the Newgate flagstaff over a brace of its heroes. Its sins, indeed, were many and scarlet; but if the War Office could by any favour of Heaven devise an Intelligence Department with half its resource, acumen, alacrity, and energy, no foe could ever have the best of the shooting by outwitting a British force. It had in general the keen wits and bodily virtues which came of short commons, hard beds, Ishmaelite relations with the world, and the perpetual need to forage while it fought.

At no point was the curriculum modelled on that of orthodox schools and colleges; neither were the

results such as a self-respecting Education Department could stamp with its approval. But they were the best obtainable; and the methods probably evinced as nice an adaptation of means to ends as intelligence has ever contrived. Schools and colleges drowse and nod, but the man who would take Beulah Place by surprise must accomplish a much harder feat than the catching of a weasel asleep. Its scouts were in all avenues, seeking provender, and keeping an alert eye for the approach of anything bearing a suspicion of officialism or respectability. For experience taught that such appearance meant a demand, or a threat, or something else equally unjust and obnoxious.

An hour after Messrs. Herstein and Meckles set out together there was a sudden commotion in the reeking court, a commotion which flew up slimy stairs on bare feet, and broke in cries of alarm from floor to floor till checked by the topmost ceiling. Doors were banged as on a pursuing ogre, and tiny hearts beat hard, for the monster of affrighted infancy was without, possibly sharpening his dragon teeth for a cannibal feast. Startled fathers and mothers prepared grimly for action on the first hint of any design on goods and chattels.

"Ah! they run, Meckles," remarked Mr. Herstein, amused by the scurrying of small feet.

"They do," said Meckles. "They know me round here, and are aware from kids up that I don't stand no nonsense."

"No nonsense, Meckles," said Mr. Herstein gratefully. "That is proper and right."

Two, however, remained; one visibly defiant, the other grave, with a wide-eyed curiosity. He of the wide eyes was a recent arrival from the fields and woods. The grime of Beulah Place was already beginning to dim the loveliness of his country purity; but the dimples were not all gone, nor the rosiness wholly subdued to the local hue. In that lingering suggestion of chubbiness he stood in singular contrast to his companion, whose peaked face, colourless save for the ingrained smut, bore the hungry, harried look of the submerged city child. When childhood is without roses, and soft, plump curves, and quiet, fearless eyes, it is high time for the national physician to be stirring. In the end of all things, when God comes to judgment, He will put a group of city children, waifs and windle-straws, in the forefront, so that rich men, and kings, and rulers, and judges, and counsellors, and the great of the earth may behold them; and He will say: "Inasmuch as ye did it or suffered it to be done unto one of these little ones, ye did it and suffered it to be done unto Me. Ye did it and suffered it to be done in your greed and your selfishness because ye wanted gold and glory and pleasure; ay, and some of you cruelly got yourselves profit out of their hunger and their thirst and their nakedness, their disease and their deformity, and heeded not their cries of distress and stifled moans

that ascended in the bitter night, even to Me on My Throne. Have ye got your gold that it may save you in this hour?"

Being completely absorbed in an exceedingly lucrative present, Messrs. Herstein and Meckles took no thought for remote contingencies of judgment. It was not their business to consider whether slum urchins had roses in their cheeks and laughter in their eyes, and sublime, careless merriment in their hearts, or anything in their clamorous stomachs. The business of men of the world is something far different. And to the end that they might do their duty and accomplish their purpose, Mr. Herstein and his factotum stood in the middle of the Court and surveyed its blackened walls and crumbling doors and broken windows with a sleek, serene satisfaction. What they beheld was crazy and dilapidated; yet the incongruous truth is that it was richer than Golconda or Ophir. Mr. Herstein, an excellent judge, held the fixed opinion, in which he was confirmed by Meckles, that if you could only fill England with streets of the quality of Beulah Place it would be better than Paradise for the property sweater. As long as both men knew it, it had been chronically down at heel, chronically out at elbow, chronically hungry, drunken, dirty, disreputable, vicious, rebellious, always going to ruin, yet miraculously holding on in its tottering infamy. They knew also, and the knowledge filled them with joy, that every crack in its blotched walls, every hole in its rotten,

worm-eaten wood, every crevice in its filthy pavement, every heap of garbage in its noisesome yards, was loaded with precious ore to such as possessed the secret of latter-day alchemy. From that and similar squalor came minted coin and massive West End mansions, yachts, horses, carriages, serving men in gorgeous livery, opera boxes, country houses, Paris gowns, balls, receptions, bridge parties, and much gaiety and splendour beside.

Having studied this bonanza in great content from without, the pair advanced to the door of a four-storey tenement, on the step of which was seated the boy with the defiant face. He rose as Meckles drew near like a cat at the approach of a strange dog.

"Well!" growled Mr. Meckles by way of greeting.

"Well!" returned the boy, poising lightly for flight.

Mr. Herstein bent towards him with a well-meant smile. The Jew loves to patronise; he loves especially to patronise a Christian; even a child is not beneath him.

"May I ask your name?" Mr. Herstein said graciously.

"You may," replied the boy with a grin, and added for encouragement; "any hidjit can arsk questions."

Mr. Herstein stiffened in offended dignity. It was a mistake to patronise in Beulah Place, as he ought to have remembered.

"Who is he, Meckles?" he asked, with an inclination of the head towards the boy, who stood hitching the single string that served for braces.

"One of the kids of the place, and a bad 'un," answered Meckles.

"Oh, is he?" cried the boy. "And wot are you, I should like to know, a bloomin' hangel?"

He turned to him of the wide eyes and chubby face.

"Peter'j'n" (The child's name was Peter John, but Beulah Place promptly abbreviated to Peter'j'n), "Peter'j'n," he said, with a mingling of irony and contempt not to be reproduced in printed words, "you was tellin' me 'bart hangels in 'eaven; 'ere's one of our sort."

He bolted; but Meckles's panther spring was too quick and sure for him.

"If ye don't let me go," he cried, looking into the purple face of his captor, "dad'll bash yer 'ead in, see if 'e don't."

"If dad don't pay his rent, he'll see how the bashin'll come off," retorted Meckles. "Is he upstairs?"

"No, he ain't."

"Mother up?"

"No, she ain't."

"Anybody up?"

"Yus, the biby, and I've got the key in my pocket."

"Good," said Meckles. "We'll begin at the top."

He pushed the boy before him into the inner darkness, Mr. Herstein and the wondering Peter'j'n following close behind.

An ordinary boy would have resisted, sulked, whimpered, or tried to escape; this boy, being wise with the wisdom of stripes, attempted no such folly. But as he climbed, three steps ahead of Meckles, he gave vent unrestrained to the sentiments of his heart.

"Ope as dad'll ketch ye," he said with bitter glee. "An' this 'un's wuss'n any I ever 'ad before."

"Got a new dad, eh!" returned Meckles, quite unmoved by this intelligence of paternal change. In Beulah Place fathers and husbands came and went like pleasure seekers at a fair. "What 'appened to the old 'un?"

"Wot d'ye think?" chuckled the boy. "Got six months 'ard," he added with pride. "That's wot's 'appened to 'im."

"What for?" Meckles asked indifferently.

"For bein' a blessed hass," replied the boy. "That's wot for."

Wrong-doing, in the estimation of Beulah Place, consisted, not in the committal of crime, but in the idiocy of being found out.

"And the new dad?" inquired Meckles, with the same blank unconcern.

"Says if 'e ketches you round 'ere sunthin'll 'appen."

"He's quite right," assented Meckles, "sunthin' will 'appen if he ain't careful."

A strange silence was on the stair; but Meckles knew as well as if he could see through pine boards, that ears were hearkening intently behind shut doors, that hearts were beating resentfully, and that muttered curses weighed on the pestiferous air; and he climbed with a grim exultation in his own power of kindling hate. What mattered hatred to him? They were all in his grasp, every man, woman and child of them, and he had but to compress his fist to make them squirm and howl. But for his ignorance of history he would have admired and envied Nero as one who did what he liked on a magnificent scale.

Near the top Mr. Meckles suddenly stopped.

"'Ullo," he cried, "'ullo, what's this?"

The handrail ended in jagged spikes many feet short of its natural and allotted length.

"Wot's wot?" the boy asked, turning in well-feigned surprise.

"Handrail," said Meckles gruffly. "Come, who done it?"

Now, from the Beulah Place point of view certain things were worth lying about, and certain other things were not worth lying about, a fact quickly realised by the juvenile intelligence. When the chance arose it was worth while lying about anything to eat or to drink or to wear, because these have all a practical bearing on the problem of existence. But a broken handrail, when the deed was another's, was not worth the trouble of devising a plausible

falsehood. Wherefore the boy answered like a Washington:

"Oh, that's some of the new dad's work!"

Meckles knew the accents of truth when he heard them. The boy had deviated into virtue, and the manifest duty was to encourage him.

"Tell me about it," said Meckles, with as much sweetness as could be got into a raucous voice on the spur of the moment. A boy is open to flattery, even in Beulah Place. To be able to give special and exclusive information concerning a fire, a fight, a robbery, a murder, confers a halo of glory. It made the coatless urchin swell joyously to reveal what he did not in the least wish to hide. So he told how the new dad, coming home the night before and finding no fire, swore a great oath and went out to the stair-head.

"'Eard as 'eaven 'elps them as 'elps 'emselves," he said, "'ere goes." And he wrenched off three yards of good sound railing, which he proceeded to convert to firewood, regardless of the "row" prophesied with absolute conviction by the boy's mother. When the boy had told his tale, Mr. Herstein remarked quietly from behind:

"Meckles, there's a law."

"There is," said Meckles resolutely, "there is. They'll find that out presently."

The case was not rare, though Meckles had proved over and over again that in the end it was much cheaper to go out and buy coal at two

shillings a hundredweight than take stair railings for nothing.

At a command, which he had no thought of disobeying, the boy opened the door, and, on passing in, the first thing which Mr. Herstein spied was the cindered end of his stolen rail in a heap of dead ashes. Beside it was the baby, whose age might be two, whose sex was a mere guess, and whose face seemed to tell of a frustrated but valiant attempt to ascend the chimney. A huddle of foul rags partially concealed its nakedness, the right fist was crammed in its mouth, and its eyes shone with the haunting, unmistakable lustre of starvation. Withdrawing the fist from its mouth, it wailed for bread, and the boy promptly shook it, with an admonition to "stop its pipe," or worse would befall it. Already it had learned to make a choice of evils. The pang of hunger is less sharp than the pain of stripes zealously applied. So it held its peace, and began to stare very hard at the visitors. What thought arose in its begrimed, forsaken little head can only be conjectured, but all at once it popped to its knees and made for Mr. Herstein, with an evident intention of clasping that gentleman's leg. Perceiving its object, Mr. Meckles thundered "Sit down!" and instantly the crawling mite obeyed. Pleased with the prompt obedience, Meckles glanced down.

"You know what's what, don't 'e, little black face?" he said, almost kindly. But the expression of the eyes that looked up at him was one of

abject fear. He turned quickly from the baby to the boy:

"Yer mother's always grumblin' and goin' on," he said sharply, as if boys were legally and morally responsible for their parents' habits and conduct in general. "'Ere's a gentleman come to see about it, and she ain't in. What's she got to complain of?"

"Everythink, s'far's I can make out," replied the boy nonchalantly.

"Everythink!" repeated Meckles. "That's just it, sir," turning to his principal. "Ye can't satisfy them people, not if you was to establish a free beef-and-'am shop, and throw in a public-'ouse, a pawnshop, and free lodgings to the bargain. Give 'em a little, and they want more, give 'em more, and they begin to talk about their rights as calm as a May mornin'. Everythink, and a little added. That's their game. Now, boy, tell your mother she can't have no more grievances because she ain't in when we call to set 'em right. You noticed the condition of the hand-rail, sir?"

Mr. Herstein answered softly that he had marked the vandalism, which, in his unbiassed opinion, was many degress worse than disgraceful.

"Naturally it's got to be paid for," said Meckles.

Mr. Herstein intimated he would not dream of disputing a proposition so clear and just.

"Very well," said Meckles.

He took from his pocket a piece of official-looking paper, on which, after spreading it carefully on a

corner of the decrepit table, he made a correction in figures.

"We'll make it eighteen pence 'stead of a bob," he remarked, with a meaning look, which his employer acknowledged with a nod of approval. "'Ere, boy, give this paper to your mother, with my compliments."

The irreverent imp snickered.

"With my compliments," repeated Mr. Meckles sternly. "And you can explain, if you like, that the change in the figures is for the damage to the hand-rail. 'Tain't meant for firewood."

With that he swung about, observing to Mr. Herstein that they were ready for the next; and Peter'j'n, who had been watching and reading events with a child's intuition, darted downward to warn his mother of impending danger.

CHAPTER VII

PETER'J'N'S CRIME AND THE CONSEQUENCE

THEY visited every room, on every floor, in every house in the court. With a fine irony Meckles explained to the occupants that "this gentleman," jerking his head at his illustrious principal, had laid aside all other business and come expressly to look after their comforts. Now was the time to state grievances. Let those who wished to complain complain now, or be for ever silent. And in the event of dissatisfaction he, Meckles, was ready, as a fair and reasonable man, with a concession, to wit, that those who were not content with Beulah Place, its rents, air, accommodation, and conditions of life generally, were at perfect liberty to go elsewhere. He would put no hindrance whatever in their way; he would even expedite their departure, because he might state in confidence thousands were eager to enjoy its delights and privileges at a considerable advance over present figures. Indeed, he was daily besieged by applicants for admission within its charmed precincts. In each room he made the same

little speech; in each room, save one, he received the same ready assurance of content; and in each room he left the same little paper, intimating that, in consequence of increasing costs of repair and swelling rates and taxes, all matters beyond his control, as the blind could see, he was forced to raise the rent by a trifling addition of a shilling, eighteenpence, two shillings, or half-a-crown, according to need. Thus, with a beautiful devotion to duty, the pair went through twenty houses of half a dozen families apiece repeating the same open, manly speech and distributing identical slips of paper carefully adapted to individual exigencies, which, being interpreted, means that the screw was put on with a force nicely adjusted to the several capacities of the victims.

In one instance only was the operation resented with the rudeness of open hostility. The discourtesy came from Peter'j'n's mother, who, being new to Beulah Place, had not yet fully undergone its reformative discipline nor mastered its code of manners. A little while before she had taken it upon herself to point out to Mr. Meckles certain defects in her little room. Thereupon with his own hands (that the thing might be beyond suspicion of scamping) he nailed a round foot of an old bacon-box over a hole in the wall, and over a crack he put (also with his own hand) at least twice as much wall-paper, costing not a fraction less than 2½d. per piece. These repairs executed, he added sixpence a week to the

rent, as was his just right. Yet she had the ill grace to pass disparaging criticism on the bit of decayed bacon-box and the two feet of wall-paper, and to object with amazing energy to the imposition of sixpence, because being country-bred and full of erroneous notions concerning the divine rights of landlords, she knew no better. For reasons pertinent to time, place, and situation the extra sixpence was paid. But she vowed by everything holy that, come what might, she would not, while she had breath, tolerate another imposition; and the time having arrived for the keeping of her vow, she proceeded to inform Mr. Meckles, in fervent Anglo-Saxon, what she thought of him personally; what she thought of his methods, his stinking bacon-boxes and scraps of wall-paper, and, above and beyond all, his Jewish greed and hardness.

Disliking violence and having a perfect faith in his henchman, Mr. Herstein gently withdrew at that monstrous libel on his race. Politic in everything, he prudently set a Christian against a Christian; so he slipped peaceably away that the British jackal might in his own masterly fashion secure prey for the Hebrew lion. Mr. Herstein had no interest in squabblings. He was content with his pound of flesh which the English law, more liberal than that of Venice towards Shylock, permitted him to take in his own way, allowing him as many ounces to the pound as he cared to take, and raising no quibbles about drawing blood.

In that crisis of domestic history Peter'j'n stood by his mother, protectively holding her skirt, a mighty indignation, the valiant, unadulterate indignation of five and a half flaming in his heart and shining in his eye. Though hazy as to the matter in dispute, he understood, with the infallible insight of affection, that the argument went against his mother. Several times before he had noted that she was vexed and troubled after this man's visits, and now things were manifestly coming to a head. Tears were in her eyes, and she spoke vehemently and bitterly. There could be no manner of doubt she hated this man with the purple face and the ugly bull-dog look. There was just as little doubt that he deserved hatred; for any man, woman, or child who ill-treated Peter'j'n's "mummy" was a fit subject for the lash. In times of peace and prosperity Peter'j'n might occasionally be disappointed in her tardiness to appreciate a boy's tastes; but in time of trouble she became a precious possession, to be guarded with one's very life-blood.

His own eyes filled as he looked at hers. And then all at once a God-implanted instinct moved, and a great resolution throbbed in the valorous heart. In his father's absence he, Peter John, aged five and a half to a day, and therefore already a man of puissant right arm, was naturally head of the house. Hence it was his bounden duty to protect "mummy" and little sister who slept in her cradle for all the world as if nothing whatever

were happening. How absurdly careless of their own interests babies were, to be sure! But, *noblesse oblige*, that was Peter'j'n's obligation to look after women and children. With a fiery chivalry inciting to a clear duty, he stepped back unperceived, whipped a carpenter's awl from a shelf, and, taking a race, drove it with might and main into the handiest part of the enemy's thigh. With an oath Meckles turned, and Peter'j'n went head first into a corner among pots and pails.

Quick as love, his mother was bending over him, mingling terms of endearment and words of vengeance. Peter'j'n lifted a bleeding face, and she snatched him to her breast. In the same instant a pair of soft arms closed tightly about her neck.

"Don't cry, mummy," he said, visibly crushing back his own tears. "I'm not killed, mummy dear; don't cry—and—and I gave it to him, mummy," he added, casting a defiant look at Meckles.

That gentleman was muttering in red wrath. The wound was not serious; but the impudence of the young cub was outrageous; and the two combined gave Meckles a chance that was not to be missed. So he characterised Peter'j'n and all belonging to him in a phrase familiar enough in Beulah Place, but on no account to be put in print for the eye of Christian England at large. Peter'j'n's mother turned upon the traducer, not like the lioness robbed of her whelps, but like the mother in defence of her boy, the wife in defence of her husband, a

much finer, deadlier kind of turning. From his tower of strength Meckles jeered at her, repeating his words of offence, and she a mite of eight stones had the effrontery to smite fifteen stones of bullying manhood across its insolent, infamous face. There are Englishmen who would die rather than strike a woman; there are Englishmen who would much rather strike a woman than die, and Meckles was of the heroic number.

A scream came from Peter'j'n when the brutal fist shot forth murderously, and his mother recoiling from the blow overturned her baby's cradle. Thereupon a double wail arose, and Meckles, finding opposition crushed, glared an instant and went.

At the foot of the stair he met a man, weary and dusty, whom he knew well, but whom in present circumstances he did not choose to recognise. It was Peter'j'n's father. A cold fear clutched the roots of the incomer's being at sight of that visage of evil omen coming forth. It remained with him ascending the stair. It deepened to consternation when he entered his own room—his home, Heaven help him!—and found his wife crouched on the floor sobbing, with Peter'j'n crying over her, his own little face streaming crimson. Then the cold became a raging heat.

"Who did this?" he asked hoarsely.

Peter'j'n lifted beseeching, terrified eyes.

"The bad man hit mummy," he said, nearly choking on the words.

"The man who has just gone downstairs?"

Receiving the answer he expected, Peter'j'n's father wheeled and disappeared, going down in pursuit as if his feet were wings. Seeing him coming with set face, Meckles put himself into an attitude of defence. The other advanced very white, very silent, his lips compressed, his brow knit, and at striking distance he struck in the irresistible strength of fury. Meckles staggered, recovered, and was struck again. Then, without casting a backward glance, the striker turned and reascended the stair.

His wife met him at the door, stained with weeping, ghastly with fear.

"What have you done, Jim?" she asked, reading disaster in his set, deathly whiteness.

"I don't know," he answered dizzily.

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"Have you done anything to him?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"I don't know; hope I've killed him."

"My God!" she cried, wringing her hands. "What is to become of us? What is to become of us?"

As in a lightning flash she had realised what the quarrel meant.

Jim stared very hard a moment as if trying to make out her meaning, then staggered to a chair, his chin on his breast, his shoulders drooped as if broken.

Within ten minutes his wife's question was partly answered. The stairs creaked under heavy feet, the door opened, and two policemen entered, followed by Meckles.

"That's him," he said; "James Heath. I give him in charge for assault."

Heath rose. He was a big man, with the brawn of the country still in condition. He looked as if he meant to fight, and the constables, knowing Beulah Place, were ready.

"Daddy," said Peter'j'n, taking his father's hand and looking up, "what do they want?"

Heath bent to kiss his boy, and in that instant the constables seized him.

MANUKA

CHAPTER VIII

MISCHANCE AND A HONEYMOON; THE HEATHER ON FIRE

THE interval of his agent's absence at the police-station on the necessary business of putting Heath away was agreeably spent by Mr. Herstein in making observations on his own account. Despite the villainy of tenants, despite a hundred crosses, obstructions, and vexations, he was not in the least dejected. On the contrary, but for the certain scoffing of Gentile sons of Belial, he could have lifted a song of Zion, so pleasing and prosperous was the course of events. Meckles, too, when he returned, was chirpy and beaming. The assault had not damaged him to any serious extent, and the moral triumph made his face shine. One detail remained, and to that he attended at once. It was to serve on James Heath's wife a notice to quit, without privilege of paying the increased rent, a notice she received in an insensibility as of death, a frozen whiteness of despair that was a more eloquent tribute to Meckles's power than torrents of abuse. That duty discharged, he rejoined his chief, who had

awaited the completion of affairs with exemplary, unperturbed patience.

The pair were at last leaving Beulah Place in gratified content when, as chance would have it, there hove in sight a lady, a gentleman, and a bulldog. Though the circumstance cannot be accounted strange, the trio were nevertheless so remarkable that Meckles unconsciously pulled up at sight of them. The lady he instantly recognised as the mother of the fugitive arab to whom he had entrusted the first of the notices ; the gentleman was manifestly the "new dad." With the exception of the dog, which was preternaturally grave, as with a sense of responsibility, the party was unmistakably festive ; and, indeed, they were at that moment returning from the "Cherry Tree," a noted public-house round the corner, where they had been gaily celebrating the honeymoon. Perhaps it was the ecstasy of being once more a bride which caused the lady to break into a hoarse guffaw on spying Meckles.

"Rent collector," she explained to the bridegroom, adding one of her crispest of epithets.

"Where?" he asked, in a voice that made the dog prick his ears.

The bride pointed a finger at Meckles, and the bridegroom called out lustily, "Come 'ere, you blooming moke. D'ye 'ear? If you don't stir yerself a bit quicker'n that, I'll let the dawg at ye."

But with the tact of her sex, the lady contrived a better way.

"Want to interjuce my new 'usband," she laughed huskily, rolling across to where Mr. Herstein and Meckles stood. "Chawley, come 'ere."

Chawley and the dog crossed together. Meckles, eyeing them, smiled the lofty smile of him who has rubbed shoulders with Belgravia and Mayfair.

"Thanks," he said. "'Tain't necessary."

"Oh, it ain't, ain't it?" retorted the new husband, steadying himself to take in the situation.

"No," rejoined Meckles curtly. "'Tain't. I've just been at your place and left a communication." He looked at the lady.

"Until further notice," said the new husband, fixing a glittering eye on Meckles, "all communications to be addressed to the undersigned. Yours truly, Chawles Pickens."

"Oh, Chawley!" giggled the lady, wiping an oozy mouth.

"Yours truly, Chawles Pickens," repeated the new husband, keeping his eye hard on Meckles. "Yours truly. All communications until further notice."

He took a step backward, spun on the edge of the curb, stepped forward again, swaying perilously, and with the aid of the new Mrs. Pickens, came to a rigid perpendicular, grimacing solemnly at Meckles.

"An' as we've met on this 'appy hoccasion, wot was you at my place abart?" he asked with a leer.

"Chawley," broke in the lady, with a shrill laugh, "I do believe ye've gone an' bin drinkin' arternoon tea, an' it's tiken yer blessed 'ead."

She put up her hand playfully, swept the cap off his head, and cast it on the pavement, shouting uproariously over the token of affection.

Mr. Pickens looked gravely at her for a few seconds, as if considering whether he ought to reciprocate in the customary way.

"Not yet," he murmured, stooping with marvellous contortions to pick up his cap. "Not jest yet."

It was too soon to indulge in a "walloping" during the early hours of a honeymoon. Such attentions might get a woman into bad habits by leading her to expect too much.

"Poor dear," cried the lady sweetly, adjusting the cap at a rakish angle over his right ear, and tenderly pulling his hair down into his eyes. During this operation Meckles made a movement as with the delicate intention of leaving the happy couple to themselves.

"'Alt!" cried Mr. Pickens, as peremptorily as a drill sergeant. "You ain't told me yet wot you was adoin' of up at my place, eh?"

"Rent and broken hand-rail," replied Meckles, keeping discreetly on guard.

"There, Chawley, I told you wot would 'appen," put in the lady.

Mr. Pickens screwed his face into a terrible image of wrath.

"Are you aware," he said, hiccoughing at Meckles, "that if I was to say the word, this dawg 'd 'ave

yer bloomin' pipe cut 'fore anybody could hinterfere, couldn't 'e, Ben?"

Rolling his eyes upward, Ben gave the remnant of his tail a single confirmatory wag. Then he gazed fixedly at Meckles, as if estimating that gentleman's capabilities in a fight. The dog seemed content if the man were willing. Growing uneasy over these Christian amenities, Mr. Herstein gently suggested to Meckles they should move on.

"Old 'ard, ole clo," retorted Mr. Pickens promptly. His experienced eye had instantly divined the racial blood flowing under Mr. Herstein's olive skin. "We ain't done with you yet," he added, squaring his shoulders magisterially. "The case is this. I steps out for a little while. You says 'wot for?' 'Tain't none o' yer business, that's wot for. But for to please myself I goes out, an' 'e," jerking a contemptuous thumb at Meckles, "'e comes mokin' round a gen'leman's quarters when the gen'leman ain't in. Ain't 'e a pretty sort of back-door-watch-round-the-corner kind of sneak, eh? Now, 'avin' got so far, wot 'bart the rent an' the 'and-rail?"

It was ordained that Meckles should not answer that question, for it had scarcely left Mr. Pickens's lips when there came from Mr. Herstein an exclamation of surprise, in reality a sharp cry of pain, which swept the interest into other channels. They found him looking round like a hunted beast seeking covert. And, in truth, he would have given precious gold at that moment for a convenient hiding-place. But

mischance had him, for while his eyes searched there came in cheery tones—

"Oh! Herstein, didn't expect this, you know. Pleasure, I'm sure."

At that Mr. Herstein, gallantly facing the inevitable, called out in equal gratification, and hastened to meet his friends. In his heart he wished them with Pharaoh at the bottom of the Red Sea.

Had an angel alighted on one of his crumbling chimney tops to warn him of impending disaster, in the ancient fashion, he could scarcely have been more astonished, or secretly more dismayed. For the friends were none other than Mrs. Cadwallader Roy and Sir Sydney Dormer. A third person accompanied them, a clergyman, who was introduced to Mr. Herstein as Mr. Emmet, vicar of St. Emmanuel hard by; and even as the great man gave his oily finger-tips, suavely, after his manner with strangers, his hawk-eye caught the malignant gleam of his lieutenant's face. Obviously Meckles knew this Rabbi of the Gentiles.

In truth, Meckles knew him far better than was at all to Meckles's liking as a person who, with sickening airs of goodness, went to and fro and up and down the slums interfering with what did not concern him. His doings were dignified by various fine names; but Meckles characterised them in one reeking epithet, too ardent and sulphurous, unluckily, to be reproduced on paper. He belonged to the exasperating fools who went about denouncing

legitimate pleasure as a degradation, and calling honest profit in rents a grinding of the poor, and a traffic in souls. That was a pretty doctrine in a civilised land. Oh, yes, Meckles knew these self-righteous busybodies. They were the pestilent lot who would give slum-dwellers art wall-paper, and decorated ceilings, and hot-water pipes, and tiled lavatories, and brass and mahogany fittings, and all the grandeur and fatness of life, just like proper Christians or real ladies and gentlemen. This Gospel snipe, for instance, with whom Mr. Herstein was shaking hands in blissful unconsciousness of what he did, had actually, on a chance encounter, called Meckles and his kind land-sharks more cruel in their methods than their sea brethren. But for fear of legal and other consequences, Mr. Meckles could have retorted in a way that would ensure eternal silence on the part of that particular slanderer. What such perverters and defamers needed was six months hard every time they got on the stump, and things would never be right till the law were amended so to deal with them. There was no exchange of greetings between the agent and the vicar to divert the attention of the others.

"Who'd have expected this, Mr. Herstein?" Mrs. Cadwallader Roy inquired archly, her eyes taking in as much of his transformed East End appearance as was compatible with good manners.

"Nobody, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy," he replied

blandly, in spite of a cruel pain. "Nobody could have expected this."

"May it not be a good omen? I don't think I'm in the least superstitious, Mr. Herstein, and yet I do believe a good bit in coincidences, chance meetings, and all that. I think we ought to erect an altar to Chance—she's a great goddess."

"Very great," Mr. Herstein owned ruefully.

"And I daresay her little unconsidered act in bringing us together here would be regarded by my friend Mr. Emmet as a good augury."

"Excellent," said Mr. Emmet, with a meaning she scarcely understood, for all her quickness.

"I warn you, Mr. Herstein, Mr. Emmet's just a tiny bit dangerous. He likes to infect his friends with the slum-microbe, just for the fun of marking the progress of the fever, I do verily believe."

Mr. Herstein laughed a little stage laugh, devoid of merriment.

"And why should Mr. Emmet think our meeting here a good augury?" he inquired softly.

"Well! he tells me that one of the chief difficulties in dealing with these slums is to get respectable people like ourselves interested in them." She laughed mischievously. "He says that if only he could get bank directors and other capitalists to do their duty, we should have places like these improved off the face of the earth in no time. Do you know what he had the audacity to tell me the other day? He said that if only he could put the fear of hell into the

West End he would probably succeed in getting a little of the joy of heaven into the East."

"Mr. Emmet perhaps likes his joke," beamed Mr. Herstein.

"I don't call it any joke having the fear of hell put into you," returned Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, with gay gravity. "I think it would be a very serious and unpleasant business. He said, too, that in the West End we have no social question beyond dress and dinners and receptions, and the theatre and bridge, and all that. Well, here we are, Mr. Herstein, to dispose of that slander. I went myself and caught Sir Sydney on his way to yawn at his club after a directors' meeting; so I whipped him off here—to find you. How delightful! If I'd known, I'd have brought Rachel. She'd enjoy the adventure. Mr. Herstein, how did you ever find your way straight to the centre like this?"

In some vague way Mr. Herstein managed to indicate he owed that felicity to Meckles, whom he knew by chance, and *sub rosa*, as it were. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy nodded, smiling, as if to say, "Just so. Ah! you men, you men."

Now Pickens, being intent, and just then uncommonly inclined to sociality, was pleased to take the nod as a signal to himself, and promptly advanced.

"Chawley," cried the bride, linking herself fondly on her lord's arm, "ye ain't goin' without me, are 'e, dear?"

In the same instant Peter'j'n came to the door of

his mother's tenement and emitted a yell that rang frantically through all Beulah Place. Pickens turned in some annoyance.

"Kids must allus be 'owlin'," he said irritably.

"Chawley," remonstrated his bride, "don't you go an' forget as you was onct a kid yerself."

Peter'j'n yelled again, so sharply that the bride, abruptly dropping the bridegroom's arm, ran across the street, her dishevelled bosom teeming with an emotion blended in equal parts of gin and the maternal instinct of protection common to every woman.

"What's the matter with the child?" Mrs. Cadwallader Roy inquired, also crossing, with Sir Sydney and Mr. Herstein at her heels.

Receiving no coherent answer from Peter'j'n himself, the bride turned to her own boy, who was assiduous in his friend's grief.

"Do you know anything 'bout it, Dolf?" she asked. Baptismally he was named Adolphus, on a fancy of the registrar of births, deaths, and marriages; but Beulah Place abridged him to Dolf.

"Yes," replied Dolf eagerly, "I do," and thereupon gave a lucid and graphic account of recent events.

"It was 'im that did it all," he ended, flourishing a triumphant hand at Meckles.

"How did he do it?" Mrs. Cadwallader Roy asked sweetly.

"Oh!" returned Dolf, inflating with importance,

"'e wanted to bang Peter'j'n's muver abart, an' Peter'j'n 'e wouldn't 'ave it. 'E was abusin' of the biby too."

"Wot biby?" demanded his mother, in sudden alarm.

"Our'n," answered Dolf, gleaming over the prospect of sport.

The baby that hitherto had been an encumbrance and a nuisance all at once became precious.

"My biby," cried Mrs. Pickens, emulating the tragic tones of Rachel in her weeping. "My biby abused when I'm away from it. Chawley, go an' punch 'is bloomin' 'ead for him, there's a dear."

The cold of trickling ice shot into Mr. Herstein's spine. His breath stayed in horror. Was this wretched woman going to involve him in odious revelations?

CHAPTER IX

SHOWING ISRAEL AMONG THE PHILISTINES, AND MR. PICKENS AMONG THE LADIES

TO his intense relief Mr. Emmet interposed. "No, no," the arbiter protested, with the smile which was a better charter of authority than a bench-ful of magistrates. "No punching of heads, please. It doesn't pay."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Cadwallader Roy demurely. She turned to the baby's mother. "It is so easy to make mistakes, and so unpleasant to set them right, isn't it?—especially in police-courts, and places of that sort."

Mr. Pickens, having no infatuation for babies nor any importunate desire to fall out with the law, remarked cordially: "Quite right, mum. 'Tain't any fun to face the beak when the thing ain't wuth it."

Punching heads was perhaps good enough amusement when there was nothing better to do, but he was a fool who would let it interfere with business. With luck, something might be made out of all these fussy people; and, not to put too fine a point on

it, the honeymoon revelry at the Cherry Tree had left Mr. Pickens in urgent need of supplies.

The natural thing to do was to investigate. So it was proposed, with the complete approval of Mr. and Mrs. Pickens, that the visitors should go upstairs to view the maltreated baby for themselves, also to inquire into the condition of Peter'j'n's mother, who was understood to be breathing her last somewhere in the pestilential darkness above. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, getting ready her handkerchief and smelling-bottle remarked cheerily, "Come, Mr. Herstein. Here's a chance too good to be lost. Now we'll really see something of the inside of the slums."

He could have implored her to refrain, assured her on his honour she wouldn't like it, but he merely grinned in a dubious politeness and a writhing agony. His first impulse was to plead other engagements and make off, but that course opened up horrible possibilities of slander, falsehood, and exposure. It was better to go on and endure than fly, leaving these fools in possession.

"Pardon me one minute, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy," he said. "Seeing I have had the good fortune to meet you, I will dismeess this man."

Accordingly he re-crossed the street to Meckles, who had throughout maintained an attitude of disdainful indifference, and the two briefly exchanged sentiments in a low voice, with many furtive glances at the intruders.

"I wish they were burning in Gehenna, Meckles," said Mr. Herstein with unction.

"Amen," returned Meckles. "This is wot spoils things; this is wot gives tenants their upsettin' idears. That passon oughter be skinned alive and then boiled in oil."

"He ought," Mr. Herstein agreed; "but as that is against the law, we must be patient, Meckles, and careful—very careful. Look here, Meckles, till the Philistines are overcome I'm just a friend of yours. You understand?" He smiled with exceeding craft. "I did not see anything of what has happened to-day; no, and I'm not acquainted with Beulah Place. See?"

His eyes glowed, the craftiness of his face deepened; the immemorial expression of his race, older than Jacob's deception, overspread his countenance.

"Clear's a foggy day in November," returned Meckles. "As I understand it, I ain't to mention your name. I ain't to say as ye've ever been near Beulah Place before, and don't own it, nor pocket the rents and do the bleedin' on the sly. I'm to take all risks and responsibilities, rows included. Ain't that it?"

"Quite so," replied Mr. Herstein softly, "quite so." He was proud of the intelligence which grasped essentials so quickly and surely. The Englishman is no diplomatist, and Meckles answered as with a bludgeon:

"Very well, I'm agreeable. It'll be an extra two and a half."

Mr. Herstein blinked as from a blow.

"You mean two and a half per cent., Meckles?" he asked, holding his breath.

"I mean two and a half per cent., arranged in advance," answered Meckles, who knew his man at least as well as his man knew him. "'Tain't much for the work, and no questions asked and no names given. Why, I might be knocked on the head 'fore the day's out. I don't much like the job, and that's honest. There's been a set of the wind lately that don't exactly suit my constitution. But I'm always ready to do my dooty, providin' the pay's all right. Lord! what would become of me if the truth 'bout you was to come out? I tell you, two and a half's a low rate for the risk."

"I cannot stay, Meckles," responded Mr. Herstein in visible anguish. "You can see they are waiting for me. I depend on you, Meckles. Be faithful, and you will not be sorry." With which injunction he hastened back to his friends.

"Nice old dicky-bird you are, ain't 'e?" chuckled Mr. Meckles as he watched his master's retreat. "Think I'm going to risk my chances of heaven for nothin'? I have sins enough already that don't yield no satisfactory returns—lots of 'em. New 'uns must pay 'fore I take 'em on. You can afford to stump up, you jolly old screw, and what's more, you shall, if I know anything."

The visitors ascended the inner darkness, with many caustic comments on the dangerously rotten condition of the stair, of which Mr. Herstein meekly forbore to take any notice whatever. Meekness further induced him to avoid all reference to the broken hand-rail, a subject on which Mr. Pickens evinced a similar modesty and reticence. In the garret, when at last the groping climb was over, they found the baby with three-fourths of its body squeezed into an upturned slop-pail, like a snail that had quitted its shell and was trying desperately to return, wrong end first. In this case, however, the attempt was part of an endless and generally futile quest for food.

"Oh! the poor lamb; look at it," exclaimed Mrs. Pickens at sight of the bare black legs kicking out behind.

By a miracle of self-management, proving a profound experience of the effects of gin, she stooped, caught a leg, pulled the child out as a poacher might pull a rabbit out of a hole, snatched it up in a smothering embrace, and adroitly collapsed on the bed. There, rocking herself, she asked endearingly between hiccoughs what they had been doing to mummy's pet while mummy was out? The bad man would "have it 'ot," mummy's pet might take mummy's word for that.

Wriggling in the unaccustomed caress, the baby turned and looked inquisitively at the company. Twice in one day strangers had invaded its loneliness;

something, the baby mind argued, must be happening. The question was, Would it ease the eternal craving within? Gazing with big eyes at Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, the child opened its mouth in a curiously suggestive manner, and thrust in a defiled fist.

"I do believe," cried Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, in all the excitement of discovery, "I do believe the poor little thing is hungry."

But for the fact that it was impossible to come within less than two paces of anything so redolent of all manner of pollution, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy would have caught up the starving mite to her costly bosom.

"Don't you think it is?" she said, turning to Sir Sydney Dormer; and Sir Sydney, being polite, agreed that probably her conjecture was right. He was as little able to distinguish between a slum-child that was hungry and a slum-child that wasn't (if such a phenomenon be known) as between the relative glory of Jupiter and Orion. So far as he could see, which he owned wasn't very far, slum children were all alike—that is to say, all dreadfully in need of scraping, scrubbing, and a modicum of courtesy. As to food, it appeared that Nature, in some mysterious way, provided they could do without eating like other people's children. In the same way she arranged they could do with just the minimum of clothing required to hide the nakedness prohibited by law on the ground of common decency; while as to the virtues of soap and water, it was with

them as with the Esquimaux, the dirtier the happier. Children of Nature he had heard them called; and children of Nature, he understood, do not suffer the pangs of cold and hunger after the manner of the well-born or civilised. But being assured by Mrs. Cadwallader Roy that unquestionably this particular child was hungry—as hungry, in fact, as if it had fasted with a clean face and a lace pinafore—he acted like a man; that is to say, he produced half-a-crown and ordered Dolf to buy currant buns, or suet pudding, or pork pies, or anything else of the sort he thought might effectually stay a young and delicate stomach.

"Wot!" cried Mr. Pickens, suddenly asserting himself as head of the house, "wot, 'arf a crown for kid's grub! Give it to me, I'll see to it."

"Chawley," protested Mrs. Pickens, mopping a humid countenance, "don't you go and make a row now, dear. Don't 'e do it."

Chawley retorted about the wisdom of wives and other inferior beings attending to their own concerns, and requested to be put in instant possession of the half-crown. Whereupon Mr. Herstein whispered to Mrs. Cadwallader Roy that, as the man was plainly dangerous as well as disreputable, they had better withdraw. But mischance had him again. The baby having evidently satisfied its curiosity without in the least lessening that craving within, cried for rations in the very moment in which he spoke.

"Stop it," said Mr. Pickens sternly. "Ye'd give

the lidy a 'eadache with yer 'owlin', you would." His massive right hand shook it into submissive silence.

"You naughty man," cried Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, "to be so rough with the little darling."

"Oh! bless yer 'eart, m'lidy, that's it," put in the baby's mother with a husky gurgle. "A little darlint."

She clutched the little darlint to her disordered breast, nearly choking it in the access of affection.

"Sal," said Mr. Pickens meaningly, "you take care." His look said, "I don't want to take the trouble of chastening you, but, by Jingo, if I do——!"

"I believe," said Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, "you'd beat your wife on very little provocation. Come now, wouldn't you?"

Mr. Pickens could not refrain from laughing. Beat his wife! He would no more think of denying his exercise of that right than of disavowing his habit of taking breakfast.

"Well, it's not Christian," rejoined Mrs. Cadwallader Roy firmly.

"Wot's that exackly, mum?" Mr. Pickens asked.

"Good, right, proper, respectable," the lady explained.

"I see," said Mr. Pickens gravely, "I see. An' it ain't Christian for a cove to wallop his own wife, eh? Well, wot's Christian, I should like to know?"

"Kissing her instead of beating her," answered Mrs. Cadwallader Roy promptly.

"I see," said Mr. Pickens, grimacing in spite of himself over the odd notions that were getting abroad. "I see. Kissin's Christian. Well, mum, all I can say is there's a 'eap of Christian stuff abart that ain't wuth much. Lor' bless 'e, I knows people that could kiss by the job that ain't no more Christian than you or me. But as I'm a cove as allus likes to learn, I'll tell 'e wot I'll do, mum. If you kiss me to show 'ow I'll pass it on to 'er"—jerking his head at Sal—"s'elp me Bob."

Mrs. Cadwallader Roy glanced at Sir Sydney Dormer, in blushing dismay.

"How shocking!" she remarked.

"Ain't 'e goin' to show me 'ow, mum?" Mr. Pickens inquired.

"You're in for it," Sir Sydney laughed.

At that Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, putting spurs desperately to her courage, stepped forward and presented her cheek; but Mr. Pickens drew back, with a high head.

"Not going to keep your bargain?" she asked in astonishment.

"Not in that flapdoodle style, mum," answered Mr. Pickens frankly. "Fair and square, and no hokey-pokey. 'Cos ye see, mum, my idear is the lips is the kind of tackle for that sport, and wot I says, mum, is this, kiss proper or chuck it."

Mrs. Cadwallader Roy glanced again at Sir Sydney, a sudden heat as of fire on her cheek.

"You're in for it," he repeated gleefully.

She turned and surveyed Pickens critically from head to foot. By no stretch of fancy could he be called handsome or inviting.

"Well, mum, is it off?" he asked with a humorous smirk.

"Your ideas and mine scarcely agree," she explained. "Gentlemen kiss ladies on the cheek."

"Oh, do they?" said Mr. Pickens. "Well, mum, 'tain't my style, that's all."

"You're in for it," chuckled Sir Sydney. Mr. Emmet was also smiling, and even the extreme gravity of Mr. Herstein's face was relieved by a flicker of merriment.

"Perhaps you think I haven't the courage," Mrs. Cadwallader Roy retorted recklessly. "You'll see."

She took a deep breath, shut her eyes tight like one going over a precipice, and stepped forward. In the same instant Sal threw down the baby and started furiously to her feet.

"Afore my very face," she shrieked, "afore my very face. Chawley, don't you 'ave nothin' to do with 'er. You ain't goin' to 'ave my man," making as if she had designs on the usurper's headgear. But Mr. Pickens pushed her off with a masterful arm, remarking that, since the proceedings were entirely in her own interest, she had no cause of complaint. She subsided, protesting vehemently against Mrs. Cadwallader Roy's modes of Christianising, until Mr. Pickens bestowed upon her openly, in sight of

the whole company, as hearty a smack as the most Christian heart could desire.

"Oh! you jolly old flirt!" cried Sal, bubbling good humour like a spring. "Chawley, dear, yer a terror 'mong the lidies, an' no mistike."

But Chawley's mind was running on more important business.

"'Ullo," he cried, turning suddenly, "where's that nipper off to?"

Dolf had disappeared, taking the half-crown with him.

CHAPTER X

A CHILD'S PRAYER; AND THE PAINFUL EXPERIENCE OF MR. HERSTEIN

HE returned presently, laden with confectionery of a hue and odour sufficient in themselves for any ordinary appetite. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy bent daintily over the rancid heap as it was cast on the table.

"Ugh!" she cried, recoiling suddenly. "How in the world can anybody eat that?"

But Dolf, grinning till his mouth was a slit from ear to ear, assured her it was very good; and the baby had to be forcibly prevented from choking itself out of hand in the pure ecstasy of having a long-felt want so delectably supplied. The delicious surprise was beyond all thought or expectation.

"Poor little beggar, see how it gobbles and strains," Sir Sydney remarked in an aside to Mr. Herstein; and Mr. Herstein murmured sympathetically, in response:

"Yea, indeed, the poor little beggar," adding mentally, "May the breath be stopped in its cursed gullet."

All this while Pickens had been brooding over the wanton waste of money.

"'Arf-a-crown for kid's grub, an' a lot of mucky stuff at that," he presently growled, the wrath of the outraged economist flaming red in his face. But the passing of another coin, this time into the proper hand, brought one of the sudden and magical changes to which our variable nature is subject. Mr. Pickens was beaming.

"Ye can understand my feelin's, can't 'e, sir?" he remarked to Sir Sydney, in polite apology for his late ill-humour.

"Perfectly," was the ready answer. "Perfectly. I've been disappointed once or twice myself in the course of life."

"And know wot it is to want to cuss?" said Mr. Pickens, whereat Sir Sydney nodded like a brother.

The Pickens' household made temporarily independent of Fate, the visitors departed to call on Peter'j'n's mother, under the guidance of Dolf. As that ingenious youth was about to open the door of Mrs. Heath's room without the formality of knocking, all at once he turned with a dimly seen gesture for silence. Drawing near on tip-toe, the others listened to the sound of a child's voice in earnest pleading; and this is what they heard:

"Oh, dear, good God in Heaven, that hears the prayers of little children, make mummy stop crying, for I tan't, and bring daddy back to us. It was not his fault, but the bad man's. You can do anything.

You are so great and strong. Dear God, bring daddy back to mummy and little sister and me."

A sob, a woman's poignant sob, broke on the weak but trustful petition.

"Don't cry, mummy," said the childish voice, "I'm asking God to bring daddy back, and He's stronger than all the bad men put together, isn't He, mummy?"

The answer was not audible; but the little voice went on.

"If you please, dear God, bring daddy back, and then take us away out of this to where the sun shines and there are birds and trees and things. If You do this, dear God, I'll never be naughty again. Please, please do."

There was a pause, and then came in the bright confidence of absolute faith:

"There, mummy, I've asked God to bring daddy back; and He'll do it, never you fear."

When certain of the listeners got the lump out of their throats, Mr. Emmet, superseding Dolf, tapped gently, and pushed the door ajar.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Heath, may we come in?" he asked; and on a timid invitation the party entered, some of them cursing the ill-luck which brought them.

In an obscure corner beside the bed a woman, who had risen hastily, stood curtseying; and in front of her Peter'j'n, his eyes vivid with emotion, took up a position of defence. He smiled a welcome to

Mr. Emmet, whom he knew, but on the others, and especially on Mr. Herstein, he looked in doubt not unmixed with defiance. If they came with evil intent, they would compass it across his fallen body. London, he felt, had become one huge cruel conspiracy against all he loved. Therein he was wrong, as many of his elders are wrong. London does not trouble itself to conspire. It merely goes its own way, minding its own concerns, with a supreme indifference to all other ways and concerns. Its stupendous wheels grind to death; but not in conspiracy. It slays more than all the armies of Europe; but not in revenge. Towards its victims it has no personal feeling whatever. Maiming and killing come into the day's work, that is all, and London kills and maims and passes on, a blind monster, unaware of its own cruelties.

Even Herstein and Meckles never thought of conspiring. As honest men and good citizens, they were following a perfectly lawful calling. One tenant was to them exactly like another tenant, a kind of orange, to be squeezed and in the end cast out into the gutter. In their vocation they observed the detachment, the beautiful impartiality of the governor and warders of a jail. Indeed, their principle was the safe jail principle of numbers, not names. A number involves no sentiment; a name may. If you hear that the wretched Muggins has committed suicide, and left a widow with a brood of hungry, half-naked children, the heart is laid

open to all the insidious effects of pity ; but if you are told that third-floor-back, number 17, has gone and hanged himself, the matter is instantly lifted beyond touch of passion or risk of sentimental bias. Euclid had probably the heart of a rack-renter.

In his childish notions of conspiracy, then, Peter'j'n' showed a pathetic ignorance. He did not know that in the great system his father, his mother, his sister and himself, with all their feelings, longings, and affections, were ciphers, meaning nothing, except so many shillings per week of rent. But how did he get his philosophy? How did five and a half get the searing, blighting conviction that all the world was leagued against it? Are not sunshine and merriment the natural elements of five and a half? Ought not five and a half to be out with a kite-string in its hand, a glow on its face, and boisterous enjoyment animating its whole being? All that need be answered here is that the governors and managers of Beulah Place, and many places like it, took efficient care no such nonsense should hinder their progress or diminish their profit. And possibly that explains how infantine Peter'j'ns get their tragic philosophy.

A little to Peter'j'n's surprise, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy spoke as if she really meant to be friendly, and had not come for any ulterior purpose whatever. His mother thanked her, nervously apologising for the disordered state of the room and her own tears.

"Ah! you are in trouble," Mrs. Cadwallader Roy

responded soothingly. "Will you tell me about it?"

Peter'j'n's mother moved forward into the light, and the great lady marked she was young, with a fair, open face, and hair for which a woman of fashion would give any price; brown, with a lustre which misfortune and misery had not yet dimmed. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy knew well that no such hair ever came to maturity in Beulah Place. It was hair nurtured by sun and wind, by joy of heart, and bright exuberance of life somewhere far from East London. Sir Sydney, too, gazed with sympathetic interest; but Mr. Herstein would joyously have given a year's increase of rent to be well out of the cursed place. Mr. Emmet kept modestly back to give great folk a chance to observe for themselves.

His mother being unable to answer with sufficient promptness, Peter'j'n struck in.

"I'll tell you," he said, with a flash of the eyes. "A man came and hit mummy. I struck him with this," gleefully producing the awl. "After that daddy struck him some more downstairs, and the police came and took daddy away."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Cadwallader Roy in horror.

"Yus," chipped in Dolf, eagerly, "'is dad was took to the lock-up. 'E knows," nodding at Mr. Herstein.

"Oh, dear me!" groaned that gentleman, beginning

to perspire. "This is really very painful, very awkward and painful. I happened to come up here with the man you saw in the street, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy; the same I dismeesed outside, Sir Sydney. Perhaps you know him, Mr. Emmet."

"Perfectly well," replied Mr. Emmet, with a meaning expression.

"Well! there was some quarrel. I do not know what. These people, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, are always quarrelling. They are like the cats; they would not be happy at peace. I did not want to see the quarrel. I did not wait. It was none of my beesiness to see them hitting each other. I left them. After a little the man you saw, Sir Sydney, came out. Another man, this woman's husband, I take it, followed and knocked him down —twice. After that came the police."

Mr. Herstein made a gesture as if to say, "That's the whole story of my connection with the miserable affair."

By this time Peter'j'n's mother was able to tell the tale on her own account. Her husband had been out looking for work. "He's a carpenter, and a good carpenter," she said, with wifely pride. But there had been a lock-out and he had lost his job, just when he was beginning to get things straight after a severe illness. The rent-collector had called, and there was trouble.

"The rent-collector," repeated Mrs. Cadwallader Roy.

"Yes, m'lady."

Mrs. Cadwallader Roy glanced at Mr. Herstein, who felt as if frying in his own fat.

"There was trouble?" she said, giving her attention to Mrs. Heath.

"Yes, m'lady, Peter John did something."

"Put this in him, as I told you," cried Peter'j'n, wickedly flourishing the awl.

"There you are," said Mr. Herstein, with a shrug of the shoulders.

These people were hopeless from the beginning. Somehow Mrs. Cadwallader Roy was not shocked over Peter'j'n's enormity.

"Did you put it far in?" she asked, smiling upon the culprit.

"As far's I could," was the quick reply. "You should have seen him jump."

It was great fun sticking awls in offensive men. Peter'j'n's mother, resuming, told how the fun ended for them.

"Knocked you all down?" said Mrs. Cadwallader Roy.

"Yes, m'lady."

"The brute!" came fiercely from between the white set teeth of Mrs. Cadwallader Roy.

"Then," continued Mrs. Heath, "my 'usband came in and found us all upset. So he just turned and went after the rent-collector, and I knew no more till he was took."

"Of course he must appear at the police-court to-morrow?" Sir Sydney asked.

"Yes, sir, I s'pose he must."

"Well," said Sir Sydney, "law's law, and if he broke it by assaulting the rent-collector, I'm afraid he'll have to take the consequences, though there may be mitigating circumstances."

"Worse than that, we've got to quit when Jim's in jail," said the suffering woman; "for the collector came back and gave me that."

She handed Meckles's notice to Sir Sydney, who passed it to Mr. Emmet. Mr. Herstein groaned inaudibly.

"Say, Herstein, your friend has been making things hum," Sir Sydney remarked to his brother director.

"I have told you, Sir Sydney, the man is no friend of mine," Mr. Herstein returned almost crossly.

Meantime Mrs. Cadwallader Roy was devoting herself tenderly to Mrs. Heath.

"Has anything like this ever happened to you before?" she asked.

"No, m'lady, never. The hand of a policeman was never on Jim before, and it's for me he's in now. He's a good 'usband, m'lady."

"Doesn't knock you about?" said Mrs. Cadwallader Roy softly.

"Knock me about!" cried the unhappy wife. "He'd die first. Jim never laid a hand on me 'cept for fondness—never."

The tears were streaming again.

"Oh, I wish we never came to London!" she cried in the impulse of a quivering grief. "London calls and beckons like the sea, to swallow people. If ever you know folks wanting to come to London from the country, m'lady, tell them, implore them to keep away. There's a curse here. If I saw the man that owns it, I'd tell him to his face he's a fiend, for it is built of broken hearts, it is mortared with blood. Crime and cruelty and the wages of sin keep it up. Yes, a curse is upon it, and I add mine, for my heart is breaking too."

Mr. Herstein's blood stood frozen in his veins. Was the very trump of doom sounding?

"Your grief is very raw and green," Mrs. Cadwallader Roy said, drawn to this woman as to a sister. "Another time you'll tell me more. It's too painful now." In some agitation she took from her purse half a sovereign. "There, do me the favour to accept that. It may be useful."

"And this," added Sir Sydney, promptly doubling it. "Here, Herstein."

"What is it, Sir Sydney?"

"A sovereign for this poor woman, whose husband has been haled away at the instance of that rascally rent-collector."

Mr. Herstein stared. He give a sovereign—to one of his own tenants! He'd see her—and yet——

"It's a deserving case," said Sir Sydney warmly. "If you haven't any loose gold, I'll advance it for you with pleasure."

What consideration weighed with Mr. Herstein, what feelings tore him in that moment of anguish, can only be conjectured; but with an expression such as a man wears under the dentist's instruments, he handed over a sovereign. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy smiled benignly.

"That's a little something to go on with," bending towards Mrs. Heath. "There, dear child, is my card. I'll see you again. We must get at the hardened wretch behind all this, mustn't we, Mr. Herstein?"

And Mr. Herstein grinned like one assenting to his own execution.

CHAPTER XI

AN ODD SAMARITAN

CLEVER people have found out that everything in this world, sweet or bitter, is as you take it. Good fortune and bad are simply points of view—mere freaks and foibles of the senses; so that what happens to be tragedy here is rippling comedy or even roaring farce there. To Beulah Place speaking generally, a casual appearance at the police-court was no more than a trivial deflection from the ordinary path, at worst a vexing hitch or pause in the pursuit of the graver interests of life. But to the little Heath household it marked the nadir of degradation, the very blackest blackness of disgrace. As the elegant Mrs. Cadwallader Roy would recoil from the physical contamination of pitch, so the country-bred Chris Heath shrank in affrighted shame from the moral defilement of the criminal law.

Left alone with Peter'j'n and his baby sister, she fell into a passionate despair over the terrible evil which had befallen them, an evil which seared even

while it smirched with dishonour. They could never hold up their heads again, never—never. Was it for this they had left the old home and friends and all the wholesome, happy influences of the country? They came as so many before them came, as so many after them will inevitably come, drawn by the glamour of the deceptive city, the glamour which turns to exceeding bitterness, the city which, Saturn-like, devours its children.

They had been less than a year in London, and already it had come to this. "This," she repeated chokingly, snatching her children to her desolate bosom. Oh! that they might all die together and be at peace.

Perching himself on her knee, Peter'j'n put up a pair of chubby arms and gripped her tightly round the neck, pressing his face hard against hers. The baby, lying at ease, in a crook of the left arm such as mothers alone know how to make, blinked at the ceiling in a glorious indifference. A long time they remained thus. Darkness fell like a smoky pall on the treacherous city; into that darkness sprang a myriad lights, and still the devoted three did not move. By-and-by the baby, having no concern to keep awake, fell asleep as blissfully as if the world were all a balmy happiness. Soon after the sweet angel breathed on Peter'j'n also; his eyelids grew heavy, his clasp loose. Then Chris Heath rose softly, put one little sleeper in the cradle—a luxurious fad on which Beulah Place had

commented with characteristic scorn—and the other in bed. As her custom was, she held Peter'j'n's hand while, in the nodland between sleeping and waking, he said his evening prayer, the only child in Beulah Place so taught. As usual, he asked God to watch over and bless daddy and mummy and little sister and all kind friends, the Divine compassion being especially invoked for Dolf. At the word "Amen" he started into vivid consciousness.

"Where's daddy?" he asked.

"Daddy will be here in a little while, dear," was the answer. "Sleep now."

On that assurance he laid his head down. Next minute he was beyond care; but his mother, bending over him, wept silently. That night she did not pray with her boy. She could not. What was the use of praying? God Himself, it seemed, had forsaken them. There was no God in Beulah Place. He had cast it off to perish in its sin and misery. Gazing through her tears at the sleepers, she asked herself whether it would not be best if they were never to waken, never again to open their eyes on a world of distress and crime and sorrow? Why were they born? Why was she born?

Crouching as in sudden fear, she covered her face, and in truth she was afraid to look at them, afraid of her own thoughts concerning them. What was to become of these two helpless, innocent sleepers in the long, dark future of wretchedness? God in Heaven, what was to become of them? It was

nothing that she should suffer; but that they should be exposed body and soul to dangers she durst not think of, that they should be at the mercy of men, cruel as tigers in their greed, was intolerable. Her innocent boy, her innocent girl, waifs and strays to be flung headlong into the roaring maelstrom that devoured like a ravenous hell! In that terrible moment she thought of many kinds of death and the means of accomplishing them. Was it painful to die if the thing were done quickly? Could a mother's hand not deal the stroke gently, so that it should be but the parting caress of love? Her darlings, she would not hurt them, not by so much as a lover's playful pinch. God knew that—and yet—yet—could she not go taking them with her? Falling asleep here might they not, if she were resolute just for an instant, wake yonder with no knowledge or consciousness of Beulah Place?

How many cherished lives hang on such a question when love grows distracted! How many sapient judgments dense-headed coroners' juries pass on the results of such thoughts!

Shuddering, Chris lifted her head, and listened to the soft rhythmic breathing. By the dim light of a small lamp she peered into the face in the cradle; it was serenely happy. She looked at the other face on the pillow of the bed; it was smiling. Then in an agony she dropped to her knees and hid her own in the coverlet, breast and shoulders heaving convulsively. She prayed now, not audibly, not in

set words, but with the inarticulate passion of contrition which is acceptable above all sacrifice. Even while she sobbed out her remorse there fell on her a strange solacing influence. She felt it distinctly; had no doubt whence it came. Her thoughts went out with new force to her husband, persecuted by unjust men. For his sake she must be strong and brave. She was not her own; she belonged to him, to him and the dependent sleepers by her side, even as they all belonged to One who would surely not forget in the end.

Rising from her knees, she dropped upon a chair to think and plan for her beloved. A double procession seemed to be on the stair outside, with the common accompaniments of ribald jest and obscene oath and hoarse alcoholic laughter. Below her window in a yard, which was a human bear pit half the day and all night, arose a sound of scuffling and of angry, drunken voices. Then followed in logical sequence a scream and a thud, indicating that the stronger had struck and the weaker gone down, according to the established law of Beulah Place. Chris Heath did not move. A few months before she would have leaped up in horror; but such things were commonplaces now. Just a moment she wondered if the woman were killed. The silence might mean either that she was mortally struck or had the sense to hold her peace in the presence of a superior power.

Overhead the voice of Pickens was asserting itself

also in altercation. The next minute Chris heard a rending crash. Pickens was helping himself to more of Mr. Herstein's costly banister, regardless of Sal's vehement admonitions.

"'E'll be back an' put another bob on the rent," she screamed; "see if 'e don't."

"'Ope 'e'll try while I'm about," Pickens responded, and Sal knowing, as a wife should, when to suspend argument, was silent.

Pickens stamped on the torn section of rail to reduce it to the necessary splinters.

"Glad the bloke below let 'im 'ave it," Chris heard him say between the crashes. "Only 'stead of knockin' 'im down an' lettin' 'im be, he oughter 'ave bashed in 'is 'ead for 'im. I will if 'e worries me."

"An' get took," said Sal, "an' maybe scragged to the bargain if the bashin' was too well done. No, Chawley; don't you be a-goin' in for no Newgate 'ornpipe like that. Some day 'e'll be done for by somebody else, an' there won't be no fallin' tears at 'is fun'ril, I can tell 'e. No, nor Beulah Place won't 'scribe for no plooms. Wish 'e was twenty foot underground."

Chris could hear Pickens's snort of contempt.

"An' 'ave another cut to the selfsame pattern in 'is place," he said. "Sal, ain't you never 'eard 'bout gettin' out'n the fryin'-pan into the fire? 'Ow do you know another wouldn't be wuss'n 'im?"

'Lor," cried Sal, ignoring the question as a mere

frivolity, "the mention of fryin'-pan makes me feel jolly peckish."

This time Pickens laughed.

"Wot a beautiful accommodating happetite ye've got, to be sure," he retorted. "Awaitin' politely for the mention of fryin'-pan 'fore presumin' to intrude. Take my word, that's manners. My happetite's bin hollerin' ever since comin' in. There," completing the railsplitting like a veritable Abe Lincoln, "there's firewood; out with the fryin'-pan, an' let's 'ave some grub."

But grub had to be procured before it could be cooked and eaten, and "like a streak" Dolf was off to expend part of Sir Sydney Dormer's second half-crown, this time with precise instructions as to purchases. With a mechanical, half-conscious attention Chris Heath listened. She heard Dolf ascend again, three steps at a time, and presently an odour of frying pork began to pervade the stairs and steal into the room. Thereupon, for a while, silence reigned above; and her thoughts clustered afresh about the imprisoned Jim.

She must go to see him; but how? She durst not leave the sleeping children alone; and there was no one to watch over them. Nevertheless, she must go to Jim to sustain and encourage him, likewise to see that he was not ill-treated by his jailers. Should she rouse the children and take them with her, locking the door? She could carry them both easily, and their caresses would cheer poor Jim.

Before she could decide there was an unexpected movement overhead. Pickens, condescending to the ceremonial of kings, despatched Dolf as ambassador, with instructions to inquire of Peter'j'n's mother whether it would be quite convenient and agreeable to grant an interview to one who particularly desired the honour of making her acquaintance, because of certain things he had heard. Flustered and frightened Chris was devising polite reasons for declining when Pickens himself, following hard on the heels of his Mercury, lifted his portly figure in the doorway. He had eaten and was happy, he was happy and genial, genial and eager to diffuse sunshine. Moreover, as the fried pork had counteracted the effects of the honeymoon celebrations, he not only glowed with good feeling, but to all intents and purposes was perfectly sober.

"'E's told me 'bout you, mum," he said, introducing himself and indicating Dolf at one stroke, "an' wot's 'appened to yer 'usband. Them sort of things come to the best of us. Yes'm; and wot I'm 'ere for now is to say that I admire 'im, an' that you ain't to take on 'bout him bein' lagged. Lor! bless 'e, that ain't nothin' when ye get used to it. Change of snoozin'-box an' reg'lar hours for grub and goin' to bed, that's 'bout all."

As he concluded these courtesies Sal's inflamed face peered inquisitively behind. She had never condescended to speak to Peter'j'n's mother, who was accused of putting on airs where airs were not

tolerated. Her offence consisted chiefly in keeping herself to herself. Not once since coming to Beulah Place had she invited Sal or anybody else to drink a sociable glass with her, nor in any way shown the smallest desire to cultivate the friendship of her neighbours. Indeed, she passed them on the stairs or in the court with an obvious wish to avoid speech and contact, a piece of uppishness not to be forgiven. Sal therefore came, not to sympathise with the bereft wife (Sal had herself experienced the trouble and made light of it), but to keep an eye on Pickens lest that fickle Lothario should fall into gallantries. Even the sight of misery did not touch her till she saw that, contrary to Beulah Place tradition, Chris was in mortal dread of Chawley's advances. Mrs. Heath pleaded that she was in great trouble and preferred to be alone. Over the first statement Pickens nodded sympathetically, remarking that he, too, knew what trouble was, and begged to that extent to be accepted as a kindred spirit; the second he ignored.

Lusty and full-voiced, he awoke the children. The baby cried, as babies will; but Peter'j'n sat bolt upright in bed, staring with very wide eyes at the intruder. Pickens cooed like a dove, and the baby's tears ceased. Then he whistled like a blackbird, changing as by magic to the angry chattering of a parrot. Peter'j'n bobbed and whooped in delight. Thereupon Pickens warbled like a cageful of linnets. Peter'j'n encouraging him with another yelp of joy. Then from a deep recess in his bosom Pickens brought

forth a rakish, dissipated chaffinch, and at that Peter'j'n, unable to contain himself, leaped out of bed.

"Never knowed a kid as didn't like birds," said Pickens, grinning down upon him. "And now, mum," turning to Mrs. Heath, "will ye 'blige me by sayin' if there ain't anythink I can do for 'e?"

CHAPTER XII

DARKNESS OF THE PRISON-HOUSE

THE shortest route to a mother's heart lies through her children. On first impressions Chris would have fled from Pickens as from Caliban in his cups. But when in a radiant geniality he sat down uninvited, and, with the aid of the bald-headed chaffinch, whistled the baby into a crowing glee and Peter'j'n into a screaming ecstasy, he was transfigured in her eyes. A dewy pity stole insensibly into her mother's heart. Perhaps he, too, had been the victim of misfortune (a fair guess); perhaps he, too, had been cradled in purity and innocence and lightsome lovely ways of life. It might be he came from the country, where clustering roses perfume the air and cowslips gleam in the meadows, and running waters glint merrily as they laugh back at the sun. Perhaps in "the session of sweet thoughts" among the stews of the hideous city (if such thoughts were possible) he retasted the old lost joys, sunshine, fragrance, and mirth, the

dew and odour of summer twilights, the melody of village bells. Perhaps.

> When the enterprisin' burglar ain't aburglin',
> When the cut-throat ain't aoccupied with crime,
> They loves to hear the little brook agurglin',
> And listen to the sweet village chime.

Humanity is rife in surprises. All the same, Mr. Pickens would certainly have smiled had he known Chris's fancies. She gazed at him now, wondering within herself how he could be so careless and buoyant. No doubt a long course of injustice, hardship, and ill-luck had dulled the edge of his finer nature, destroyed his aspirations, choked his moral qualities, and made him reckless in his pleasure. She could understand that. He bore signs of deterioration which even a dauntless joviality did not hide. The kindliest fancy could not make his countenance a mirror of virtue. His dress was such as Chris could never allow Jim to wear. It was frowsy ; it was bagged out of all shape ; it presented the most extraordinary variety of pockets she had ever seen concentrated on one man. One could imagine him stowing away about his person not merely a single bird, but an entire aviary, if not an entire menagerie. If the pockets were ever full together, he must be distended like a balloon or the crinolined ladies of early Victorian fashion. Every detail of appearance went to prove that he had travelled far on the downward road since in

his guileless youth he smelled the roses and the honeysuckle or lay entranced by the brookside watching the trout at play. But he still retained one attribute of innocence, his love of children; and outside of her own family he was the only person in Beulah Place who took the trouble to speak to her kindly. He might be defeatured, but he was still human.

Having transported the baby and Peter'j'n far beyond the Seventh Heaven, Pickens returned the bald-headed chaffinch to the involuted depths of his bosom, and again gave his attention to Chris.

"From the country, I reckon?" he said affably.

Chris answered eagerly in the affirmative.

"Ah, bless its 'eart, didn't I know it?" exclaimed Pickens, rocking the cradle gingerly with his great toe. "Rocketty-rock, jocketty-jock, that's 'ow the cunnin' mouse ran up the clock. The little 'un do enjoy it, don't it? When I'm in country 'ouses," pursued Pickens, as if visits to rural mansions were among his ordinary pleasures, "I allus notices the cridle. It's wot you might call a country utensil, ain't it, mum? Should think this is the only specimen of the harticle 'bout Beulah Place."

"Then you've been in the country a lot?" said Chris, glad to have her fancies of early innocence confirmed.

"Oh, bless 'e, yes," replied Pickens with much animation. "I often take a run into the country week-end, 'arf 'oliday, etcetry. Sometimes I go

with a friend, an' sometimes alone. I'm wery fond of country 'ouses, wery fond indeed."

"They're better than London," Chris said with an opening heart.

"Yes'm, on the whole I think they are," Pickens responded thoughtfully. "There's places in the suburbs that ain't to be sneezed at, an' the West Hend's pretty good. But, arter all, they ain't a patch on the country. Only last week I was out singin' 'im against Kent." He tapped the hiding-place of the chaffinch. "Lovely down 'bout there, pufeckly lovely."

By the oddest chance in the world, it came into Chris's head that only a few days before Jim mentioned a case of house-breaking in Kent, in which the burglars had the ill-luck to miss a haul of £5,000 worth of jewellery. As she told of the coincidence a singular mixed expression, like scudding shadows on a pool, came into Pickens's face.

"Ah!" he said in a queer intonation, "them things do sometimes 'appen," but whether he meant that burglaries are among the disagreeable issues of civilisation, or that burglars have at times ill-luck with the swag, Pickens did not state.

Turning abruptly to Mrs. Heath's personal affairs, he regarded her for all the world as if he were a lover hanging giddily on the brink of a proposal. And in truth his mind was busy with schemes of gallantry. As a man who knew and appreciated the country, he spoke feelingly of the hardships and vexations of

London. Perhaps she was not yet habituated to the murkiness of city life, a life too often full of incidents that one would gladly do without. It might even be that this was the first occasion on which her husband had had the misfortune to be lagged. That was no doubt a painful experience to the novice; but she must bear up. Her feelings would presently harden, so that the lock-up and "coppers" and sermonising "beaks" should cease to inspire terror. "Don't you worry, mum," Pickens said inspiringly; "you'll get used to it. Never fear."

Meanwhile, however, her sensibilities were raw and very tender; and if she felt an irrepressible longing to be with her husband for the quarter of an hour or so the law allowed, he was ready to mount guard over her household effects during her absence. She might depend on him, s'help him Bob. She might take it there would be no impertinent intrusions while he was in charge. Pickens wiped his mouth, smiling significantly, and Sal, still watching in the rear, repeated approvingly that beyond all question he was a terror.

Half an hour before, the bare idea of leaving her darlings to the mercy of this man would have sent Chris into hysterics. But many vital things come to pass in certain half-hours. In less than thirty minutes we make our entrance on the bustling stage of life; the exit takes not a tenth of the time. As Napoleon remarked, the flashing seconds determine the course of the lethargic hours and years. Chris yearned to

see Jim—must see him, if she were to live. Her children, it seemed, could trust this strange man with the enchanting bird-craft and the mystic reminiscences of the country, climb on him as a familiar and congenial friend, and plead for more of his fun. Was not that enough, seeing the instinct of childhood is divinely directed? Pickens was further irradiated with graces, the mention of which would have made him snicker in derision. But he meant what he said, and his honesty was transparent. A minute Chris debated with herself, a thousand hot thoughts and feelings in turmoil. Then she made her decision.

"You are very good," she said. "I will leave the children in your care."

"They shan't be kidnapped, mum," Pickens responded; and jubilantly as a thrush, began to warble while Chris made a hasty toilet.

On the order of her lord and master, Sal retired to the company of the baby and the bull-dog upstairs; but Peter'j'n insisted that his friend Dolf should remain.

Having thrice with quivering lips kissed the children all round, including Dolf, grime and all, Chris received directions about the shortest way to the police-station.

"I won't ask 'e to mention my name nor present my card as a hintroduction," Pickens told her with a twinkle. "But don't you be gettin' tremmly. Some of the coppers ain't 'arf bad when they're left to 'emselves, and some of 'em bein' married men can

understand a woman's feelin's for 'er 'usband. You jest keep up yer 'eart, mum."

"Thank you," responded Chris gratefully.

Once more she kissed the children, and then hurried off as if she could not trust herself to look back and was on no account to be tempted.

The streets were full, but she managed to get along swiftly, slipping in and out and round obstacles in the motley procession as if she had no more substance than a ghost. Then, without knowing it, she broke into a run, and at a street corner tilted broadside into Constable O'Ryan.

"Hullo, there?" cried Tim, turning on the panic-stricken culprit. "For a little bit av a thing ye butt well," he added, looking down. "If ye'd come into me back now in that stoile ye'd have me over as sweetly as a Kerry heifer, and me more than twice yer weight. What are ye afther, me little woman?"

"I—I'm on my way to the police-station," Chris explained, trembling in all her fibres.

"Bedad, and it's a well-trod path," remarked Constable O'Ryan cheerfully. "Have ye business at the station now?"

"My 'usband's there," the miserable Chris replied.

"'Tis a place av popular resort for husbands round about here," said Constable O'Ryan. "Ginirally spakin', the missin' man's sure to turn up there sooner or later. If it's a fair question, what's yer address when yer at home now?"

"Beulah Place," Chris answered.

Mr. O'Ryan whistled.

"Purghatry Place, ye mane," he said. "I call it that bekase it's Ould Nick's half-way house for down below. Well, I'm jist on me way to the station myself, and if ye loike I'll show ye the way."

"Thank you," Chris replied, and they went on together.

"Ye'll never have seen yer landlord now, I'll be bound," Tim remarked as they walked. "No, I was thinkin' that. The man that owns Purghatry Place is as hard to ketch at home as an Irish absentee, bad cess to him. There's many a thing that the wit av mortal man is equal to. Ye may hoult an eel be the tail, and ye may hoult a wolf be the ears, but ye might just as well try to get butther out av a dog's throat as to ketch some av thim slum quality where they get their rints. What's the throuble, if it's a fair question?"

At the answer, Constable O'Ryan whistled again. Then, with an apologetic air, he stated it had been his own painful duty that afternoon to conduct Jim from Beulah Place to the police-station. "An, listen to me," he said, "I thought him a great dale too dacent a lad for the iron bracelets. They weren't put on, though his accuser wanted it. 'Be aisy, sonny,' says I; 'it's in me moind the prisoner won't be afther escapin'.'"

Touched by this evidence of charity, and impelled by her misery, Chris was proceeding to confidences when Constable O'Ryan stopped her.

"To-morrow mornin' at tin o'clock," he said, "ye'll find me standin' forninst the magistrate to tell what I know. It's part av me duty, but it's not part av your duty to tell me widout the axin'. It's none av my business, d'ye see, whether he was right or wrong in knockin' the kibosh out av the man that was for batin' you and the childer. That little matter's atwixt him and the magistrate. I'm not paid for takin' ividence in the open sthrate when there's no call, nor for administratin' the law 'cept when it's a case av first aid. Then I may dale as I think fit, d'ye see?—kill or cure. But here's the station, and I'll just be spakin' a word behint backs loike to the sergeant. And when you're insoide or afore the magistrate don't you be throublin' yerself answering questions that's not axed. A dale av harrm's done that way. D'ye moind me?"

Genuinely grateful, Chris followed him into the station, and was presented to the sergeant in charge.

"Want to see your husband?" he said when the situation was explained to him.

"If you please, sir," Chris answered, in a tremor of awe.

"This way then," the sergeant said, taking a bunch of keys from a nail. Next minute husband and wife were together in a police cell.

CHAPTER XIII

SHOWS PICKENS IN A NEW PART, AND INTRODUCES A RIVAL

MEANWHILE Mr. Pickens, in the execution of his self-imposed trust as nursery-maid, kept the baby and Peter'j'n in a tumult of glee, and made even the hardened Dolf whisper rapturously to his friend, "Ain't the new dad just rippin'?" He was on all-fours, in the character of a very ferocious grizzly (having already triumphantly played half the Zoo with especial *clat* in the *rôles* of kangaroo and dromedary), when the fun was all at once arrested by an extraordinary burst of revelry on the stairs outside. A vocalist, manifestly out of voice and as manifestly undaunted, was climbing in raucous hilarity. Suspending their own sport, the grizzly and his merry-makers hearkened, and were thus entertained:

"I hae a house upon yon moor,
Lass, gin ye lo'e me tell me now;
Three sparrows may dance upon the floor,
And I canna come ilka day to woo.

"Man, they've made a sore hatter of this place. Nae skill in construction thae feckless English.

"I hae a hen wi' a happite leg
Lass, gin ye lo'e me tell me now;
That ilka day lays me an egg,
And I canna come ilka day to woo.

"Hullo, near a goner there! If a'm killed I'll bring an action for damages; that'll learn them."

Moved by a fellow feeling for an artist in distress Pickens went outside to investigate. On the narrow landing a figure swayed dimly.

"If ye've a Christian heart in ye," it said, lurching forward, "will ye tell me where I am?"

Being merry, Pickens laughed; whereupon the figure, steadying itself, drew up portentously.

"A'm a Glasgow chappie," it informed the scoffer; "put that in yer pipe for dottle. And listen to what a'm goin' to tell ye—now or later, accordin' to taste and convenience, a'll fecht ye for a mutchkin o' the best Scotch—yer English stuff gives me the scunner—or if yer a game cock wi' the neeves, just for the pure pleesure o' the thing. If yer agreeable one way or another we'll make it out, d'ye understand?"

Luckily for the Glasgow chappie, only a small fraction of this speech was intelligible to Pickens, and that fraction he was pleased to take jocularly.

"I see, matey," he said affably. "Gettin' 'ome?"

"Tryin'," replied the other, backing against the crazy rail. "Tryin'. I widna like to lie about it

If ye ask my candid opeenion, a'll tell ye. A'm lost. It's an ungodly place this London."

"So," said Pickens, his face wreathed in a tolerant smile.

"Stranger, eh?" queried the Glasgow man gravely. "Well, with grace and the usual London luck, ye'll get wisdom and knowledge by-and-by, though they're michty dear as things go in the meetropolis. Listen! man, I've been as fou's a fiddler down the Saut Market way thonder, among the barefooted Irish, ye ken. Let Glasgow flourish—city motto—and Glasgow, be it known to you, does flourish. There's no' the like of the Glasgow bailies in all the king's dominions, grand, God-fearin' men, and a terror to evil-doers, though what they're up to themselves on the sly's no' for me to say. And there's another thing that Glasgow's no' to be beat in—kirks. A'm prood o' the kirks. And they ken what good liquor is too. So you see it's a Christian place; and I ay won home in the end."

"And mammy put 'er boy to bed," remarked Pickens. "I reckon there ain't no mammy in London, matey, to take off the boots and tuck in on a Saturday night, eh?"

"She's in the mools," returned the Glasgow man seriously. "I saw her happit, and came away, havin' no ties and bein' a fool, as ye might say. About the London domestic arrangements, as yer a stranger, a'll tell ye how it's done. Three to a bed, d'ye understand?"

"All together?" asked Pickens, politely feigning ignorance.

"Oh, it might be possible to put three in a bunk that fits like a coffin," responded the Glasgow man; "but that's not the London plan. It's turn and turn about—on the shift principle, ye see. I've been round at the Cherry Tree waitin' my turn. Bad stuff they keep there. I'd advise ye to go somewhere else for yer drink."

Pickens bowed his thanks. "I'll remember," he said.

"If I had money I'd stand the now," said the Glasgow man; "but as ye've likely found out some time or another, ye canna ay do just as ye wish by a friend when the pooch is empty. It's a sore want, the want of money, especially when yer dry, and a body's never anything else in this hole of a place. But never mind, we'll win through to the end some gate, as the cadger said to his cuddy. Did ye ever hear tell o' the lazy weaver of Paisley?"

"Never," answered Pickens.

"Well, if ye've no objections, we'll go in by and take a seat, and then a'll tell ye," said the Glasgow man sociably. "It's cold rife stannin' on the stair. Well," he pursued, when he had passed in and appropriated the best chair in the room, "this weaver body, havin' a taste for enjoyment, did as he liked, and lived all the while in the hope of gettin' to heaven at last, and I widna have less faith than a lazy weaver. But I have nae succeeded in enjoyin'

mysel' very well in London. It was better in Scotland."

"Wot made you leave it, then?" was the natural response.

"What made the deil leave Heaven?" retorted the Glasgow man with a wink. "That he didna ken when he was well off. Some of us are just as daft as the poor old deil for all our learnin'."

"No good points 'bout the London plan at all?" Pickens asked with the interest of a native.

"I widna say that," was the answer. "If it's cold, and there's nothing to put on the fire, the bed's ay warm for ye. That's a comfort. On the other hand, ye whiles get more than warmth if the fellow afore ye's no' just livin' next door to godliness in the matter o' bein' clean. There's extras in London beds, free o' charge—the only things ye get here for nothing."

"So," said Pickens in perfect appreciation, "and 'ow long's the shift?" It suited his humour to play the innocent.

"Ye can find out for yersel'," returned the Glasgow man. "When I was a thought younger and wiser nor I am the now there was twenty-four hours in a day, lumpin' light and darkness together. Near the Broomielaw thonder, if ye was to divide twenty-four by three, as near as I can mind ye'd have eight. What ye'd have here, heaven only knows, seein' it takes three half-croons to make five bob, and the night whiles comes in the middle of the day. Take the shift at eight hours. But then, ye see, in my

case, one of the men's a woman, and it takes longer to do up curlin'-pins and petticoats and things than to slip on a pair o' breeks. So I've to wait, and I just go round to the Cherry Tree till the coast's clear. It would be a wee thought delicate to turn in afore she turned out, ye understand. I see," he added, blandly looking round on the children, "I see yer the father o' a family."

"Oh! a few kids knockin' round," replied Pickens pleasantly.

"There's never any scarcity o' them, that I can see," remarked the Glasgow man. "Nae doot it's a tryin' posection to occupy." He bent forward with a meanin' smile. "Listen; if ye come round to the Cherry Tree, I've a tanner left yet."

In great sadness Pickens shook his head.

"Can't leave the kids," he said waveringly.

"What kirk do you go to?" laughed the Glasgow man. "Well, if ye just tell me where I am and the way out, a'll be joggin'."

"Where do you want to go?" Pickens asked.

"No. 17, fourth-floor back, straight above where the man hanged himself last week."

"Oh!" said Mr. Pickens. "Wot did 'e 'ang 'imself for?"

"For want of proper inducements not to hang himself," replied the Glasgow man. "Ye see, he was hard up and had bairns to feed, with nothing in the meal-poke, as ye'd say. He came in to see me he night afore, and sat down and covered his face

with his hands, and then—— A'm sayin' did ye ever see a man greetin', sobbin' like a bairn—och! far worse than a bairn? Man, it's terrible! As sure's death, I just sobbed and grat with him—couldna help it; and there we were, hard at it, him greetin' and sobbin' because his wife and weans were starvin' and goin' to be turned out, and me keepin' him company. Ye should have heard the wild, awfae words o' him. 'Was it for this I came to this cursed place of London?' that's how he went on. 'Oh! Maggie woman,' that's his wife, 'my good, bonnie Maggie, that's stood by me among the thieves and the sharpers and the brutes without hearts—God's curse on them!—I wish I had left ye where I found you, among the broom and the whins and the yellow corn, and the friendly faces and the kind hearts; but I had to bring ye to hell, to hell, among all the fiends! We came to make our fortune, and this is how we've made it. There's the cry of the children, I can hear them; it's never out of my ears, day or night. Dave,' says he, 'I'm going mad. I know it by the burnin' of my brain. I haven't slept for a week. I want to live for their sakes; but if I can't—oh! Dave, if ye felt my brain!' that was always his cry; 'Dave, if ye felt my brain; it's crackin', it's burnin', and, Dave man, if it gives way, ye'll speak them kind?' And with that he just fairly choked altogether."

"Poor beggar!" said Pickens softly; "'e must 'ave took on mortal bad."

"Look you," said the Glasgow man, "I've done

a little shooting and progging with the bayonet for somebody or other who paid me a bob a day for the job, and I've seen sights. I've seen the life runnin' out red; I've seen it blown to smithereens in the time ye'd wink; I've seen men scattered in little bits, and roll and double up when the bullet or bit of shell took them. But nothing in war or out of it ever took the heart out of me like poor Dan's greetin'. 'Stop it, Dan,' says I, 'stop, or as sure's death a'll hit you, for I canna stand this.' 'Do, Dave,' says he as quick as lightning; 'it would be kindly done. There's something to strike with,' says he, puttin' his knife in my hand, 'and here's my heart. One plunge will do it, Dave,' says he, looking at me with his wild eyes. Ye may think I was frightened. It took two glesses of Scotch to get me over it. Well, next thing was poor Dan with a rope about his neck. Maggie's scream brought me to the spot. I cut him down; but he was gone. A neighbour woman stayed with Maggie that night" (he did not say it was Miry), "or she'd have done for herself and the children too. And that," added the Glasgow man, "is the way of life and the uncertainty of things.

> "He was right hand cot to me last night,
> Said files upon parade;
> He's sleeping out and far to-night
> The colour-sergeant said.

A'm forgettin' the way ye told me to go to No. 17, fourth-floor back."

"Then yer forgettin' wot I never told 'e, matey," returned Pickens, affably.

"Oh! I do cliver things whiles," was the unabashed response. "Well, and are ye no' for a dander to the Cherry Tree?"

"Told ye I can't," replied Pickens, fighting seven devils of desire.

"See what it is to be the head o' a family," said the Glasgow man. "I notice the wife's out, maybe puttin' some odds and ends up the spout with her uncle round the corner, eh? The necessities o' life—the necessities o' life! If yer expectin' siller, a'll wait."

"'Tain't three brass balls an' a wet this twist, matey," returned Pickens with a wistful smile.

"I would think none the less of ye if it was," quoth the Glasgow man generously. "The needfu's ay the needfu'. Well, I notice a plan they have here about of lockin' the door from the outside to keep them that's inside safe from harrm, as ye'd say. That's always possible."

To that suggestion there came a quick and indignant response. But the voice that spoke was not the voice of Pickens. Both men turned as the soft-footed Miry emerged from the nether darkness into the dim light of the open door. Together they rose, crying out her name in astonishment.

"Oh! yes, it's me. Keep on yer 'ats, gentlemen," Miry replied, entering quite at her ease. "An s' far's I'm concerned ye needn't be lettin' yer eyes

jump out'n yer 'eads in s'prise; they might come in 'andy in this 'ere darkness. Mummy about, Peter'j'n?"

"Out arter 'er 'usband, Miry," Pickens explained for the wonder-stricken Peter'j'n.

"St. Patrick told me 'e was took for downin' that 'ound of a rent-collector," said Miry. "That's why I'm 'ere. An' you're nurse-maid, Chawley. Lor!"

She laughed in good-natured banter.

"Yes, that's 'bout the size of it, Miry," he admitted, a little sheepishly.

"Whyn't ye out with the pram?" Miry demanded. "An' where's yer ribbons, an' yer bib an' tucker, an' yer caliker frock an' white cuffs, an' the rest of the bloomin' truck? Ye ain't 'arf up to yer work, you ain't. St. Patrick should 'a come 'imself to see 'e puttin' the kids to bed proper," she added with a giggle.

"Who's this man, St. Patrick, ye speak of, Miry?" the Glasgow man asked, sniffing Popery.

"Wot!" cried Miry; "don't know St. Patrick? 'E's a jolly little passon that runs the show 'round 'bout 'ere."

"What's his denomination?" demanded the Glasgow man, with a gathering countenance.

"'Is wot?" retorted Miry.

"His denomination," repeated the Glasgow man grimly. "What's his kirk?"

"Wot lingo's that yer slingin' at me, Dave? 'E's a passon; ain't that enough?"

To Miry all churches were alike, and parsons merely parsons, without distinction, save that which naturally exists between swells like bishops and the common sort. But Dave, having been nurtured north of the border, judged kirks and ministers like a connoisseur, was a stickler in doctrine, and deft with hereditary deftness in blending Scotch whiskey and an argument in theology *à la* Jean Calvin. Miry found her hell like a volcano in full blast in this world; the Glasgow man held his in grim anticipation for the next. Moreover, just at present other considerations were working upon him, tender sentimental considerations, which made him regard this unknown parson with a double suspicion.

"Miry," he said in a tone of mingled rebuke and alarm, "are you kerryin' on with him?"

"Wish I was," laughed Miry. "But there ain't no chance of that. Too good. 'E's an angel, 'e is."

"Docked o' the wings, as ye'd say," retorted the Scot, with compressed brows. "Ye'll be tellin' us next that ye love him."

"I do," responded Miry, with a promptness and sincerity which fell on Dave like a blow. "I do love 'im. I worship 'im, that's wot I do. If 'e was to ask me to go down on my knees an' kiss 'is boots, I'd do it, glad of the chance."

Dave looked at her long and hard; then his eyes swept the uncertain figure of Pickens.

"And him?" he said, with a jerk of the head. "Ye seem to know him, too."

"Chawley?" answered Miry, with a laugh. "We were friends 'fore ever you thought of droppin' yer porridge or bringin' yer Scotch haccint to London 'ere. Wasn't we, Chawley?"

Chawley nodded, his face kindling with a sudden radiance.

Dave drew himself up, his face kindling to a different hue.

"Ye can't have the three of us," he said in all the terrible sternness of jealousy. "Got to choose."

"An' oo said I wanted you?" retorted Miry. "Don't you go an' get up yer bloomin' Scotch conceit 'igher'n it is, Dave, or ye'll bust. Yer a goose, anyway, and Chawley, 'e ain't no better. I 'eard ye say sunthin' 'bout lockin' up. If it's drinkin' that's in yer 'eads, clear out'n this; if it ain't, clap an extinguisher on yerselves till I get them kids to bed. Poor dears! just look at 'em a-rubbin' their eyes, an' mummy out."

They were hardly laid down when mummy entered, her eyes very red, her face drawn and deathly white.

CHAPTER XIV

TWO MISSIONS AND A CONTRAST

DOWNY, gentle sleep, that puts the seal of innocent happiness on infant eyes, and, as the Master has writ, knits up the ravelled sleeve of care, is nevertheless chary in assuaging a fresh sorrow. When the visitors left, the baby and Peter'j'n slept blissfully; but their mother sat in an agonised wakefulness. She had gone to see Jim in a fond if tremulous hope over certain schemes conceived by the quick imagination; she returned with that hope utterly baffled and crushed.

In the cell she radiated a heroic cheerfulness and encouragement. "Whatever happens," she told herself, with the devoted valour of a wife, which shames the finest courage of warrior or hero, "whatever happens, I must keep up Jim's heart." Hence, though the tears would not be stayed, she beamed through them as if they were ministers of joy. She found Jim in a stupefaction of despair; for in the recoil of passion he went down to the very deeps, as though lead were at his feet. Already the brand of the

criminal burned on his forehead. In a flashing and terrible vision he saw himself in convict dress, chained to other convicts, driven by guards with guns and batons, and he moaned at the thought of the disgrace to his wife and children. Once in a tumult of revolt against the whole system which oppressed him he leaped to his feet as if, like Samson, he would burst his bonds or, seizing the pillars of his prison-house, bring it down in terrific revenge. But, alas! Samson had never been bound by iron and brick in London police cells. Jim fell back in a horror of helplessness and infamy. "Oh! what have I done?" he groaned, "what have I done?"

Practice is the infallible test of philosophy. Jim Heath had blindly fancied he knew the mind, moods, and ways of Beulah Place; in a wild moment told himself he was case-hardened. What became of his hardening now? Beulah Place, speaking generally, would have called for supper, supped with relish, and made the best of a hard bed. To be in the hands of the law meant an irksome restraint; but the enforced holiday would pass, and outside was the great, fat world, waiting, patiently waiting, to be preyed upon. Meanwhile, a thoughtful country furnished provender and a quiet breathing-time to plan further exploits. Much work for police, magistrates and judges is devised in the salubrious air of a prison. According to Beulah Place philosophy one thing only put an end to a man's chances. The "Newgate hornpipe" meant, indeed, the last turn

before going permanently to bed; but otherwise there was hardly any limit to opportunity. Jim Heath had not discovered that helpful and bracing secret.

As he brooded, like a man looking into his own coffin and cursing the chance that brought it, his mind went back to a day among the hills, when the tongue of a fool cast the die for all this misery and shame. Jim had gone home to Chris big with fancies of the El Dorado on the Thames. They talked, they pictured in ignorance and high hope; finally, they packed their humble household goods and posted for the south. London received and swallowed them —without sign. In their northern hamlet they had been of some account. London made them two ciphers among millions, and straightway forgot them, save in the process of bleeding and fleecing. In the old home, too, they had had neighbours to cheer the evening with neighbourly talk; in London they struggled among a multitude of strangers, who were either brutally indifferent or brutally hostile.

They came with a little hard-saved money in their purse; yet it seemed that neither for love nor for all the money they could pay was a sheltering roof to be got. El Dorado had not a vacant spot for them under cover. They blistered their feet tramping weary pavements; they broke their hearts interviewing pert house agents—often young Jews whose English was made in Germany and Poland. They peeped into doss-houses and fled aghast. In despera-

tion Jim proposed the workhouse for his wife and child. They must have rest and shelter; he would pay to save the stigma of pauperism. Chris answered that she could die; but could not go into "the house." So in the night they became acquainted with door-steps and Embankment seats, and learned what it is to be "moved on" by the Metropolitan police. At last they came where a young Jew, in Jewish fashion, was auctioneering a single room in a tenement hovel. With the recklessness of despair Jim entered the competition, and at eight and six for a four-shilling room, with two pounds of key-money, he was declared winner. He won because he had more ready-money for the key than any of his rivals. Chris and he took possession, bringing their country notions of tenantship with them. They demanded improvements and were treated with contumely. Three landlords in succession turned them out as too troublesome, and as the search for rooms interfered with work by a perfectly natural course of descent they landed in Beulah Place.

Chris found her husband so tragically full of all this that even when she cheered him, her own heart aching, he answered disconsolately, it was idle to struggle or to try to do one's duty. Thinking to overwhelm him with gladness she presented her gold. "Look at that," she said; "we're not without friends as you think."

He looked at it in a terror of amazement.

"Chris," he cried, a fearful thought freezing the

blood at his heart, "where—where did you get that?'

In a kind of sobbing eagerness, for his manner frightened her, she told him, point by point, how it came into her possession. "And listen," she added, "it'll get you off in the morning, Jim."

For an instant his face brightened like a child's with hope, then suddenly as a child's clouded.

"It won't be a fine," he said, hoarsely, "'cept somebody speaks for me."

She considered a moment, and then quickly and confidently replied:

"Somebody shall speak for you."

"You?" he said. "D'ye think they'd mind you or even allow you to speak at all?"

"Not me, Jim; somebody better—read that."

She handed him Mrs. Cadwallader Roy's card. Jim read the name and address, then tenderly but emphatically told her not to imagine that toffs and fine ladies would bother themselves about Beulah Place or any of its inhabitants. She answered that he was mistaken. Let him wait and see. Perhaps he didn't understand all a woman could do for the man she loved. When the interview ended she came forth into the street, a great hope and purpose shining in her wet eyes, and in the dizziness of excitement hailed a cab, telling the cabman to drive an exact two miles in the directest course for Park Lane. Her business having the urgency of life and death, she explained that if he made good

time there would be sixpence extra. At the end of a mile and a half he drew up, swearing by all the gods of the cabby that he had gone over his distance a good third of a mile purely out of consideration for a "lidy" who seemed to be in trouble. Leaving the cab she popped into an omnibus with a feeling of wanton extravagance, but the nimble penny was all she was asked to pay, because 'bus conductors have less licence in roguery than cab-drivers.

Arrived at her destination she found a carriage drawn up before the door. At that vision of splendour her courage failed her, and she walked past as if she had no concern whatever with the address on the card that was crumpled in her hand. Turning, she repassed in the same apparent unconcern; but the third time, though her head was giddy and her limbs shook she ran up the steps and pulled the bell. The summons was answered by a man in gorgeous livery.

"Well," he said, surveying her with the eye of open contempt, "what do *you* want, hey?"

"If you please," answered Chris, abashed to quavering by that awful magnificence, "I want to see Mrs. Cadwallader Roy."

"Oh, I dessay," was the scornful response; "'eaps of people come 'ere on the same herrand, precisely the same herrand, 'eaps and 'eaps, I give you my word, and don't see 'er."

"I wouldn't keep her a minute," the quivering Chris assured him, "I wouldn't indeed."

"Ho, wouldn't ye?" returned the minion of purple and fine linen, "I know better than that. Why, bless ye, when women begin to talk they never know when to leave hoff. I know 'em. If your tongue was set properly a-goin' it'd run clean away with you, it would indeed."

Chris pretended to smile. To suitors the dulness of the great must always be witty, their insolence an easy joviality.

"It's very particular," she said.

"Raly! 'eaps of people are took sudden with that same complaint. Never knowed a single pusson to ring that door-bell without 'avin' something particular on 'is or 'er mind. What's particular now, heh?"

Now Chris, though ready to be meek and abase herself for the man she loved, nevertheless found her blood beginning to move a little faster under this treatment.

"Say that I'm from Beulah Place," she told him. "Mrs. Cadwallader Roy will understand."

"Never 'eard of Beulah Place," retorted the man in gorgeous raiment, as if it were a piece of barefaced impudence to mention any place of which he happened to be ignorant. "But anyway it's himpossible; perfeckly himpossible. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy's hengaged. So you'd better be hoff, come now."

"Tell her it's Mrs. Heath about her husband," Chris cried, desperately; she'll understand that."

"About whose 'usband?" laughed the man.

"Mine," answered Chris, perspiring coldly.

"That's a good 'un," cried the man. "Lost, stolen or strayed? Well, you've come to the wrong shop. This ain't a 'ome for lost 'usbands. It's a policeman you want; you'll find one round the corner that'll do your little job."

As he ended a sound of rustling came from within, upon which he turned quickly to see his mistress, a vision of glory decked for the opera, with Sir Sydney Dormer murmuring something behind. In answer to the question, "What is it, Griggs?" the creature in fine raiment began to explain; but Chris, unable to restrain herself, broke in impetuously with her own version.

"Oh! Mrs. Heath, come inside," said Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, kindly; and as Chris slipped into the dazzle of the great hall: "If you want more than two minutes, Mrs. Heath, I'm afraid we must speak another time."

Chris stated her business breathlessly, whisking away the tears and crushing down the sobs that threatened interruption. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy expressed sympathy in a tone of manifest sincerity; but Mrs. Heath had come at an unlucky hour. They were hurrying to the opera; already they were late; the horses had been standing about for nearly half an hour, and, besides, neither Sir Sydney nor herself could speak with first-hand knowledge of the circumstances leading to Jim's arrest. To which

Sir Sydney added gently, but with fateful conviction, that it would be absolutely useless their going to the police-court in the morning or in any way whatever attempting to intervene. As Chris listened every drop of blood went from her face; the great hall seemed to reel, and the dazzle of light to darken. But she managed somehow to express her gratitude for attention at an inconvenient moment, and, turning, tottered down the steps before them.

CHAPTER XV

PETER'J'N DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF IN COURT

NEXT morning, when Jim, haggard, shame-faced, and very miserable, crept into the dock beside a warder, Mr. Meckles was in attendance, according to promise and the requirements of law. So also were Mr. Emmet, Chris, the baby, and Peter'j'n, who hailed his father with a shout of welcome. An overfed official, with a bald head and a heavy butcher-face, sternly ordered silence, and Chris clutched Peter'j'n as if meaning to smother him on the spot. Dolf, peeping excitedly from a vantage point near the door, held his breath over his friend's indiscretion, and Jim lifted a suffering and stricken face. Then the magistrate glanced mechanically at the dock and business began.

Jim shuddered and Chris prayed involuntarily the roof might fall and crush her. But in that excruciating intensity of emotion they were alone. To the Court and all the Court's minions, the prisoner was merely an item in the day's work, to be tried, judged, and bundled out of sight with all possible expedition.

That he could have sense or feeling of his position was out of the question. For he was from Beulah Place, the hot-bed and chosen nursery of vice and crime. At mention of the ominous name the Bench frowned and hardened visibly. Beulah Place was not only a source of contamination, and therefore a public danger, but a chronic nuisance to that Court. More than once the ruffled bench declared its intention of going systematically to the extreme limit of the law with Beulah Place, because it existed in evil-doing, and neither feared God nor regarded man, even when the man was a police-magistrate.

With a smug alacrity Meckles stepped into the witness-box, and then Jim learned in a creeping horror how a case may appear, looked at from the other side. Having experience in such matters, Meckles was brief, pointed, conclusive. The ordinary witness rambles, repeats, hesitates, blunders in nervousness or excitement; above all, tells what he is not asked. Meckles made every word a hammer stroke. The case was even simpler than the usual record of Beulah Place depravity. As agent and collector, the plaintiff was going about his duties when the prisoner, without any warning or provocation, set upon and knocked him down twice. As he told the ready tale with an air of aggrieved innocence, Peter'j'n watched, his eyes glittering with interest. At the evidence of the knocking down he called out fiercely:

"That was because you hit mummy; wasn't it, daddy?" turning for confirmation to the dock.

Aghast at this liberty with the dignity and discipline of the Court, Meckles paused; and the Court itself, taken by surprise, looked questioningly over its spectacles at the miscreant. He had slipped from his seat, and stood beside his mother, invisible save for the flushed and angry face.

"Hit mummy?" said the Bench, with a queer look.

"Yes," replied Peter'j'n promptly; "and I stuck a thing in him for it."

"I wasn't goin' to mention it, yer wusship," Meckles remarked from the witness-box. "But it was 'im began the whole thing."

The Court leaned a little forward, while Chris, in a freezing terror, again tried to smother Peter'j'n. But he was not to be smothered.

"You stuck a thing in him?" said the Court, in a growing astonishment.

"Yes, sir," Peter'j'n answered, with the gusto of a criminal exulting in crime. "If you like, I'll tell you about it."

"The child is obviously too young to be sworn," said the clerk, looking up at the magistrate.

The latter was leaning on his outstretched arms and gazing in wonder at Peter'j'n. Whatever might be said of the prisoner in the dock, this little bud of manhood did not appear to represent the social tradition of Beulah Place. For he was clean, chubby,

bright, attractive, as a child ought to be, and a decided novelty in the dull routine of crime.

"Bring the child here," said the Bench, and immediately two policemen, an usher, and several volunteers were clearing a passage for Peter'j'n, who first insisted on conducting his mother to the place of honour, but ultimately was prevailed on to accept the dazzling glory without her.

To put him at his ease, the Court beamed upon him, and to put the Court at its ease, he politely beamed back. A friendly understanding thus established, Meckles was allowed to finish his incriminating evidence, which seemed to leave the man in the dock no hope or loophole of escape. Then the magistrate turned to his new friend.

"What is your name, my little man?" he asked kindly.

"Peter'j'n, sir."

"Peter what?"

Courts cannot accept abbreviations.

"Peter'j'n, sir."

As the interrogator still looked puzzled, Chris rose in a broiling fever and curtseyed from the back of the Court.

"If you please, your worship, it's Peter John," she explained, in a shaking voice.

Peter'j'n nodded.

"Yes," he said. "Peter'j'n. I told you so."

"The magistrate bowed his thanks to the back of the Court, and Chris collapsed.

"Well, Peter John," he said, bringing his eyes back, "of course you have been taught to tell the truth?"

"Oh, yes," Peter'j'n replied gaily. "Mummy says God is angry with people that don't tell the troof, specially little boys. Do you tell the troof?"

"I try," answered the magistrate, with an odd smile.

"Well!" responded Peter'j'n, gravely, "if you don't, God will send you to a awful place, mummy says, and never let you off again for ever and ever. And God ain't afraid of toffs, or kings, or p'licemen, or anybody; they'll get it just the same's little boys if they don't tell the troof, and do right. Mummy says so."

Mummy sat stewing at the back of the Court; the magistrate gazed thoughtfully over his spectacles at the juvenile Daniel come to judgment. Something from long, long ago came back, a swift thought, a flying recollection, a memory of times gone, touched with a sentiment strange in that place and atmosphere.

"Ah!" he said, in a voice that was not magisterial. "Mummy teaches you to be a good boy. Do you say your prayers every night?"

Peter'j'n's eyes opened in wonder at the question. Why, of course he said his prayers. How could any boy in his senses think of going to sleep without saying his prayers? Little sister couldn't pray yet. "But I do it for her," Peter'j'n explained in all the pride of age and responsibility.

The magistrate softly laid a hand on the golden crown, while the young eyes, clear as a Grecian sky, looked fearlessly up into his own. The great criminal lawyer knew innocence when he saw it, and loved it the more because of his knowledge of evil.

"Tell me," he said; "whom did you pray for last night?"

"For daddy and mummy and little sister and all kind friends," answered Peter'j'n, with a look which asked, "Whom would you expect me to pray for?"

The magistrate thought of the gilded children of luxury lying down nightly as if there were no God, while this mite prayed in Beulah Place.

"That was a good prayer, my little man," he said quietly. "Well, now, as you and I know we must both speak the truth, you'll tell me all you know about this case of daddy's. Now, take time to think, because," he smiled benignly, "sometimes when little boys, and big boys too, don't think what they say, they tell little white lies without meaning it."

Peter'j'n knew nothing of such problems in ethics or psychology; but the facts in daddy's case were plain, and the first and chief fact was that "that man," pointing to Meckles in the body of the Court, had been "bad to mummy." He told with ardour and an absolute loyalty to truth, most eager when incriminating himself, all that took place in the little room before and after his own defence of her.

"Thank you, my little man," said the magistrate

when the story was finished. "Stay beside me." Thereupon he ordered Meckles back into the witness-box, and in the style which made him a terror at the Bar, began a cross-examination.

"You heard what the child said," he would remark blandly at vital discrepancies; but Meckles found refuge in the statement that the child was manifestly and indubitably wrong, as might be expected of a child in such difficult matters.

"That'll do," the magistrate intimated at last; and asked whether anyone appeared for the defence. Getting an answer in the negative, he resumed his independent probing, whereby he ascertained, as a circumstance bearing on character, partly from Mr. Emmet, partly from the prisoner himself, that James Heath had never before stood in a criminal dock, nor offended the law, nor deviated in any way from the path of an upright citizen. That was so much to the good. Coming to the crucial point, he found that the provocation had been extreme. Indeed, taking the impulses and imperfections of human nature into account, he could not be sure how he would himself have behaved in similar circumstances. In marrying, the prisoner had explicitly covenanted to protect his wife; but the methods he adopted in the present instance were not, unfortunately, legal. He would have been justified in rescuing her if he saw her attacked, but he was not justified in constituting himself an authority and dealing out punishment on his own account, or in accordance

with his own angry judgment. That was revenge, not justice, and the law resented it. The law's resentment must be upheld. "If," asked the Bench caustically, "every aggrieved man were to deal summarily with the offender, what would become of judges, magistrates, and policemen?"

Such a course could not for a moment be permitted, even though it presented the immense advantage of being at once cheaper, quicker, and surer than the legal one. No; the law must be supported at all cost.

Peter'j'n's conduct presented another difficulty. If that too heroic child had not put the carpenter's awl to wrong uses, the Bench was convinced things would have turned out differently. Therefore, in a primary sense, Peter'j'n was the real culprit. Chris gasped, but was instantly relieved to find the Bench smiling benignly on Peter'j'n and Peter'j'n contentedly smiling on the Bench. Well! luckily there was no charge against him before the Court, though the Bench, in its most genial and benevolent manner, warned him against the erroneous notion that men's thighs were meant as sheaths for carpenters' awls. Some awful consequences of such mistakes were named, and Peter'j'n nodded cordially in assent. Eliminating the child's action from the case, and taking all other circumstances into account—motive, provocation, previous good character, and the frank, straightforward confession—the verdict of the Court was, that the prisoner should enter into his own

recognisances to keep the peace for six months. On the conduct of the prosecutor towards women and children the Bench felt no necessity to comment; but with a laudable desire to improve the occasion it added gratuitously that the Heaths ought to quit Beulah Place immediately, a piece of counsel which made Meckles grin, in spite of a raging mortification.

CHAPTER XVI

HELP YOURSELF!

FOR once, if never before or never again, Meckles was ready with all his heart to aid in the cause of philanthropy. The magistrate had counselled the Heaths to quit Beulah Place. They should quit it; by all the power of law and the zeal of agents they should, and in double quick time. Meckles laughed sardonically over the fatuity of the Bench and other fountains of wisdom. "Clear out a rat," he said to himself; "wot's the natural thing for it to do? Why, to make a bolt for another hole." It would be exquisite fun to see the Heaths bolting when he let his ferrets into their hole. For reasons in no wise connected with justice they had scored in the little scene just enacted, because the "Beak" was sentimental, and loved to take kids on his knee. Well, he laughs best who laughs last. Meckles nodded, with compressed lips. Yes, assuredly the last laugh is the best laugh; and he knew who was likely to have it this time. "'Eavens," thought Mr. Meckles, revolving in the utterness of contempt that

advice concerning the change of domicile. "How much Beaks know! Nippers 'bout the street corners could teach 'em. S'pose," he reflected, "they were to clear out of Beulah Place to-morrow, where would they go? Why, of course, to another Beulah Place." And elegant people thought to cherish and nurture slum tenants by moving them elegantly from one den to another. What next? Chicken, champagne, eau-de-cologne, and feather beds? "The bloomin' fools," he commented in a savage scorn thinking of counsellors and philanthropists. "The A1 fust-class idjits. Gawd, shouldn't I like to have 'em three months in Beulah Place."

For solace and encouragement he ran over in his own mind recent acts of fatuity on the part of Constituted Authority. It came with patent schemes of improvement which took the fancy of blibbering old wives of both sexes, who knew as much of the facts at issue, or the right mode of dealing with them, as Moses knew of steam navigation. Regardless of cost, heedless of consequence, it decreed from its arm-chair that this warren and that should be improved out of existence. And what was the result? Meckles chuckled grimly. Why, that he was able to go on steadily raising rents and increasing key-money on behalf of his esteemed master, the slum-lord. For, happily, as things were managed the demolition of one slum meant an instant congestion of all contiguous slums, and by the most logical and lucrative process in the world enhanced incomes for owner and

agent. Moreover, by a little judicious adroitness, authority could be induced to see with its blind eye, which is very blind indeed under proper treatment. One had but to touch up one's property now and then, to put a broken board here, a strip of old paper or a dab of whitewash there, take care that too much weather did not enter through the roof, and maintain friendly relations with inspectors, to have a golden harvest the whole year round. Meckles knew better than a thousand censorious "Beaks" and ten thousand reformers, even when they gave themselves such fine names as County or Borough Councils, Royal Commissions and Parliamentary Committees. He could not help chuckling again. They deliberated, they prated, they passed beautiful resolutions—yea, they even decreed with bubblings of outraged, angry virtue; and all the while the stews thickened, and the protégés of County and Borough Councils, Royal Commissions and Parliamentary Committees paid increasingly through the nose. "Last year, 'cordin' to the bloomin' talkers," Mr. Meckles said to himself, "there were nine 'undred thousand overcrowded people in this 'ere London of ours; next year we'll make it a million, an' the year arter a little more." It was a vast host to batten on before the very face of the praters. He whistled in ecstasy and contempt. What if vice and misery were increased? It was none of his business to concern himself about vice and misery. He gave himself no airs; he was not paid for that. If vice and misery existed, all

he could say was that, generally speaking, they paid on the nail and clung desperately to their holes. What was all this flummery about better dwellings for the poor? The poor fought like wolves to remain in the dens which flapdoodle philanthropy said were not fit for wild beasts. The law, with all its truncheons, could hardly force them out. What a satire on moral "Beaks" and ignorant, long-nosed reformers! Even the Heaths were in a mortal terror over the prospect of eviction. Thirty years' experience convinced Meckles that the slums desired but two things—plenty of drink and the liberty to live as they liked. He would concede both as a means of increasing the harvest.

Figuratively he squared at the reformers, challenging them to come on. In spite of them, the slum-dwellers would not only remain, but, as the course of events was proving, would increase, to be harried in the interest of those who had invested money in them; also of such as got cumulative percentages on keeping up rents and keeping down accommodation.

His mind turned to his revered principal. What would *he* have thought had he been in court that morning? The "Beak's" advice to the prisoner would have made him smile, a knowing Hebrew smile. Meckles could in fancy see it mantling and curling about the hard mouth and the crooked nose, that wonderful nose—so sure, so sagacious, so far-scented. Israel Herstein was a veritable Solomon among fatuous "Beaks" and prosing moralists, could teach

them more than they ever dreamed of, if he considered it worth while, which he never did. Amazing creature, Herstein! a man to be admired, loathed, watched, distrusted, followed, cute as Satan, grasping as Jacob, and at times too cunning even for his gifted lieutenant. Oh! yes, Meckles modestly owned his employer was at times too much for him. When Providence cursed the Hebrew, as Meckles somehow understood was the case, it left him the magic talent to overreach and convert all things—yea, even the very slime of a Gentile street—into coin of the realm. But, while he was the most receptive thing alive, he hated to pay. Herstein had squirmed horribly over the little extra percentage for dissembling. Well, if he wanted false pretences he must pay for them—the pretender's price. Why was he so anxious to conceal his trade? "And 'im so good at it," snickered Meckles, "that he gives me lessons how to put on the screw."

By instinct Mr. Meckles turned his face to the estate office, expecting to meet his principal there; by instinct also Mr. Herstein went thither, expecting to find his agent. And neither was disappointed. When the great man entered the agent was giving a fresh-caught young Hebrew a lesson in the art of slum book-keeping, and cynically admiring the aptness of his pupil.

"You'll do, sonny," he was remarking as the door opened. "You'll do. Head screwed on all right. Morning, sir," turning to greet Mr. Herstein.

Next minute master and man were closeted together.

"Well, Meckles?" said Mr. Herstein, as he hung his glossy silk hat on a peg.

"He's got off," returned Meckles, answering what was in the other's mind.

Mr. Herstein wheeled in surprise.

"I do not understand," he said.

"'Tain't hard to understand, far's I can see," responded Meckles. "The man that knocked me about for attendin' to your business is as free as you or me."

"Fine, Meckles?" queried Mr. Herstein.

"No," replied Meckles. "Testimonial of good conduct—Beak, passon, whole lot of 'em. I don't know what things is comin' to, anyway. A man deserves a month's hard, and 'stead of gettin' it, t'other side has a lecture."

"A lecture?' repeated Mr. Herstein.

"Yes," rejoined Meckles in disgust. "The old bloke laid off 'bout provocation and kids saying their prayers, and all that sort of stuff. Seems it's the right and proper thing to knock an innicent man about when yer provoked. On that plan I oughter have killed my man at the very least. Next time I'll know what to do."

"No, no, Meckles," Mr. Herstein cried in alarm. "We must keep the law. It does not pay, Meckles, to break the law; no, no, it does not pay at all."

"And I'm to be knocked down and abused at

pleasure," retorted Meckles. "That's a pretty arrangement, as the hen said to the fox when he pulled her off the roost."

"Put it on the rent, Meckles," said Mr. Herstein, smiling and dry-washing his sleek hands. "Violence is always bad policy, the very worst. Look you, Meckles, the law is made wide and loose, so that you can turn about in it as you want. You can do much without breaking the law—yes, very much; and it pays best. Always remember that, Meckles. When you are tempted to strike, say to yourself, 'It will pay best not to strike.' I knock the man down, I dance on him, I settle old scores. What then? Revenge. That is nothing. Revenge is barren; it breeds no increase; it is not increase in itself. You cannot add revenge to your bank account. You cannot buy property with it. There is no dividend on revenge, no interest. Revenge puts nothing in the purse, and may take a great deal out. If a tenant is evil, add twenty per cent. to his rent, or turn him out and take him in somewhere else at double key-money. That is the proper revenge. Thereby you will prosper, like Jacob of holy memory, when he took all the strong cattle and left the weaklings to Laban."

"Ah!" interjected Meckles. He had not heard before of that ancient dodge.

"Yes, Meckles; call to mind the patience of Jacob. You remember what the father of Israel says: 'Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee

fourteen years for thy two daughters and six years for thy cattle, and thou hast changed my wages ten times.' Think of that, Meckles; ten times."

"Bloomin' fool to stand it," rejoined Meckles sneeringly.

"Ah! but Jacob got a blessing at Peniel for his patience," pursued Mr. Herstein. "Be faithful, and thou shalt have increase. The proverb is old and true, Meckles. Add twenty per cent. for punishment to the evildoer, and as you receive it you rub your hand so. Meckles, the patient shall possess the earth. The singer of the blessed canticles gives that promise."

"Oh!" said Meckles, who was always interested and attentive over business tips. "What was his name, sir?"

"Solomon, King Solomon the Great of everlasting fame," answered Mr. Herstein with unction. "The same who built the holy Temple."

"I know," said Meckles, with a comical twitch of the face. "The cove with all them wives. Yes, I've heard of him. Must have had a lively time, sir, when he took his family for a 'oliday. Some caterin' to do there, I reckon, and I shouldn't wonder if His Majesty did a little overcrowdin' 'tween times."

"He gathered great riches and glory, because he was wise," Mr. Herstein rejoined with some warmth. "Had a throne of ivory, and much gold."

"And all on the plan of makin' other folks stump up," said Meckles. "'Pears to me, sir, it's the only

payin' plan in this world. A man don't get carriages and hosses and ivory thrones, and all that, by workin' hard on his own hook. He's got to take it out of others."

Now, Meckles had stumbled upon the very principle which Mr. Herstein had discovered a quarter of a century before, and acted on with unflagging zeal ever since. But as it would be foolish to assent too openly, he merely smiled, repeating the axiom that "patience pays."

"Very well," responded Meckles, with a straight look, "we'll see. If I've got to be patient, if I've got to put up with the abuse of your tenants, and pretend this and that and let on as I don't know nothin', I expect to be paid for it, that's all. If patience pays, what I want to know is the price."

Mr. Herstein's face darkened in a twinkling.

"I will sell out Beulah Place and all my other East End property," he declared with sudden heat, shamelessly turning his back on Jacob and Solomon, "and then there will be no more pay. It is nothing but pay, pay in this London—pay this and pay that, pay here and pay there. I am sick; I will not endure. You would think I was a haystack for all the descendants of the asses of Kish to pull at."

A red glimmer in Meckles's eye warned him, and, like a deft sailor, he tacked.

"Look here, Meckles," he said, changing to a tone of appeal; "you tell me the man who knocked you down has got off?"

"Scot free," said Meckles.

"I will tell you worse than that," Mr. Herstein went on. "I have been knocked down in my day; it is nothing. It is the loss of money that is bad. Yesterday the man's wife got a sovereign out of me. The increase of twenty weeks gone at a stroke."

"How did she manage it?" Meckles asked in a lively wonder over so rare a feat.

"Oh! she did not do it at all, Meckles," Mr. Herstein replied tragically; "it was Mrs. Cadwallader Roy that was to blame."

"That," said Meckles, with the zest of a moralist taking an enemy on the hip, "that's what comes of gettin' mixed up with women."

He could have added more, but instead thought it prudent to circle gently back to that extra percentage for politic ignorance; but at the mere mention of it Mr. Herstein's face grew black and ugly again. Meckles, however, was not to be daunted by looks.

"It stands to reason that I must be paid," he submitted. "It's a big risk, and I ain't at all sure that I like it." (This as with a scruple of conscience.) "I once heard a passon layin' off 'bout such things in a way that makes my flesh creep to think of it. Not," he went on gallantly, "as I ain't ready to die doin' my dooty. If it's your wish to be known for what you're not, and you says to me, 'Meckles, I'll depend on you,' then, sir, you may depend on me, that's all, terms bein' fair. I take all risks."

Mr. Herstein looked curiously at his agent. Subtle

and keen of intellect, he could see through and round Meckles, whom he despised as a casuist too simple for a ten-year-old child in the ghetto. Ach! these beef-witted English, with their pork and brute force, trying to be cunning. It was ludicrous. Nevertheless the clods were necessary.

"Die doing your duty, Meckles?" said Mr. Herstein, his small close-set eyes bright as a squirrel's.

"Yes," returned Meckles promptly. "'Tain't all beer and skittles, by a long chalk, as the man said when he skinned the monkey. But——"

"But you are ready," broke in Mr. Herstein. "Well, leestin to this. You know Gehenna, Meckles?"

"Heard of it," responded Meckles. "Pretty hot, by all accounts."

"Pretty hot," said Mr. Herstein. "Well, that is where I will see you before paying one farthing more. Now do not be violent, Meckles, but have patience and leestin. I will not pay what you ask. Never. It is as much per cent. as I get out of Consols, deducting brokerage and income-tax, which is the iniquity of fools who must fight. Therefore, Meckles, understand this. I will see you in Gehenna before paying more. There now, there! why will you rage like a heathen? Hear me out. I will not pay any percentage, not one farthing; but, Meckles, you can pay yourself. Ah! there, you understand me now. Beulah Place must return me so much, with a certain increase every year. But with good husbandry it may yield more. The good husband-

man can always have his extra measure of wheat. I see we understand each other, Meckles."

"Good!" cried Meckles, his face beaming like an April sky. "They'll squirm like live eels in a frying-pan when I start on 'em."

"Are you afraid of them, Meckles?" Mr. Herstein asked softly.

Meckles laughed jubilantly. Is the wolf afraid of the lamb? Does the fox fly from hens and chickens?

"Will that arrangement satisfy you, then, Meckles?' inquired Mr. Herstein.

"Farm 'em," said Meckles. "Rather."

And the pair smiled upon each other a smile that boded little happiness for Beulah Place.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DAUGHTER OF JUDAH

WHEN Meckles left to begin the course of improved husbandry which was to bring that extra measure of wheat, Mr. Herstein thought over the purport of their talk with a chastened satisfaction which presently became a poignant regret. With his customary skill he had got rid of a demand for money, but in doing so had unwittingly delivered himself, hands down, into the power of an agent who was hindered by no scruple or delicacy in the pursuit of his own interest. It mattered nothing that a wolf had been let loose on the fold; if the wolf ravened and worried, let the fold remember the first law of nature, and look to itself. It was quite another thing to yield the whip hand to such a driver as Meckles. However, the folly was committed, and sorrow for spilt milk being idle, Mr. Herstein made his way to the Standard Metropolitan Bank. There was much to be done in that typical English institution, which engaged Mr. Herstein's gravest attention—salaries to be kept down, aspiring managers to be watched, and

care taken that no man outside the court of directors should be paid more than he was worth. The staff, from the general manager down, was absurdly overpaid; but once a certain prospective governor sat in the seat of authority all that would be set right.

From the bank, after two hours of shrewd prying, he hurried home to dress for a reception to be given by Mrs. Cadwallader Roy in honour of some distinguished compatriots who chanced to be passing through London. Now, considering his scorn for most things on which there was no financial return, it may seem strange that Mr. Herstein should have been drawn from the agreeable task of studying the money-market from within by the bubble of a reception. Pray do not judge rashly. As usual, he knew very well what he was about. It happened that for the short hour which the fickle goddess allows her favourites Mrs. Cadwallader Roy occupied the crest of that giddy tide of popularity for which the soul of the ambitious London hostess pants more ardently than the hart for the water-brooks. Her name was magical among the magnates of 'Change up to millionaires, and the representatives of the people up to Cabinet ministers. Fashion fluttered about her in gilded swarms. Nay, it was perfectly well known that although a foreigner, Royalty itself was charmed with her, a circumstance which made some remark in private that Royalty might be more patriotic in its favours. Where Royalty smiled Mr. Herstein was content to bask. Besides, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy

was one of the most profitable customers of the Standard Metropolitan Bank. A ridiculously large balance stood to her credit on current account, free of interest, and half a safeful of gilt-edged securities lay to her order in the strong room, securities in which he fancied Sir Sydney Dormer took something more than a mere directorial interest.

For these and other reasons Mr. Herstein was glad to be jostled at her receptions, where there was always much to note and ponder. Thus he found more than a passing entertainment in speculating on the individual wealth of the more noted guests; in appraising the Paris gowns and the jewels that throbbed on ardent bosoms or flashed in hair which Mr. Herstein as an instinctive artist felt was often made up with astounding effects of hideousness. What did they cost? How much would a money-lender or pawnbroker advance on them? Such were the practical questions with which Mr. Herstein was fond of amusing himself as he moved to and fro in the scenes of fairy gaiety and splendour, or stood aside marking with critical eye.

But there was one other motive, more potent perhaps than all the rest, the gratification of seeing the lustre of the daughters of the Philistines paled by the radiance of his child, his beloved Rachel. All the doting affection of the most doting of fathers, all the tropic exuberance of the oriental imagination, the love of power, of colour, of pomp, of gorgeous ceremonial and dazzling display, centred in Rachel.

The core of his heart, the very pulse of his being, she was the real object of all his scheming and thinking. For her were the West End mansion, the troop of servants, the carriages and horses, the best that British gold could hire or buy. It was his dearest resolution that she should hold her head high among the best, happy, brilliant, blissfully ignorant of all that might hurt or humble her.

The children of pride must never see her flush in shame. She must stand royally like a lineal princess of the house of Judah; and he would see that the Gentile should provide the wherewithal—yes, the Gentile who vaunted his greatness and was a haughty fat fool.

It came to pass indeed that she heard of Beulah Place, as a casual jest from her dear friend Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, a circumstance which made Mr. Herstein wish there were a law to regulate feminine tongues. On the way to the reception that evening she entertained him with a lively account of adventures in slumdom, as related by her bosom friend. "She told me," Rachel added, "of your goodness in giving money to a poor woman whose husband was arrested for thrashing a rascally rent-collector who grinds the poor for some unknown monster. I have promised Mrs. Cadwallader Roy to have a day's slumming with her soon."

From his sudden look of pain you might have thought an arrow had struck Mr. Herstein.

"Rachel," he said, looking at her fearfully, "you

must not go to the slums. It is not a place for you. Tell Mrs. Cadwallader Roy you cannot. Have another engagement; make some excuse. You do not know the slums. They are Tophet without its purifying fire. They are horrible pollution. You cannot imagine their uncleanness."

If only she knew, holy father Jacob, if only she knew, or were to discover by chance. Mr. Herstein turned stone cold at the thought.

"Mrs. Cadwallader Roy says it's great fun," Rachel responded with appalling zest.

"Fun," he repeated stridently. "Fun, Rachel? It would be death. Leestin; in the slums they are rogues and vagabonds, they are thieves, they are burglars, they are murderers, and an abomination in all their ways. They regard not the law, they fear neither God nor man. Do not go near them, Rachel, even for Mrs. Cadwallader Roy."

His tone was pathetic and pleading.

"Mrs. Cadwallader Roy went there, father," rejoined Rachel. "So did you, and now that I remember she told me you were dressed for the occasion. She said it was very sensible, and that people should not go to the East End in their best."

Happily the stoppage of the carriage saved Mr. Herstein from the pain of answering this plea; and father and daughter passed to the brilliancy within.

The sumptuous rooms were thronged. It seemed that half London and all Paris and New York were

there, which is to say that the cream of the earth were assembled for a dazzling hour in Park Lane. Mr. Herstein watched his treasure rapturously as she moved hither and thither in lithe sinuous grace, a diamond star burning in the raven sheen of her hair, her bare shoulders curving softly as a dove's neck, her dress rich with oriental devices that cost —he knew what. Verily

> She walked in beauty like the night
> Of cloudless climes and starry skies.

His heart swelled exultantly at the sight. Fair as the daughters of Job when God remembered him after his affliction, and increased his wealth an hundredfold, she had alike the homage and the envy of the boastful Christian. The loveliness of Israel received its meed of honour, not out upon the solitary mountains, but in the crowded glittering halls of the Gentile. To the beautiful girl, conscious at once of envy and adoration, it was a thrillingly proud experience ; to the father, hanging passionately on his beloved, it was pure ecstasy.

No Christian, however, talking to him in the gay assembly could have guessed his feelings. For Mr. Herstein was much too complex to be read by the downright, simple-minded Saxon, whose black is black, whose white is white, with scarcely a shade or blending between. As Abraham was in the patriarchal tent so was he, plus the teachings of many lands and long generations of adversity. Even

in the buzz of that sparkling throng his thoughts were strangely alien, for they were thoughts of the singular destiny which had brought him so far from the ancestral Judah, and permitted him to despoil these Gentile butterflies. He was proud, yet not with the pride of the vain which is the conceit of the empty-headed and futile. His intelligence made that impossible. The intellect of his race, alert as the lynx, subtle as the serpent, practical as a Yankee, trenchant as a Moslem lance in the dawn above Hebron, and withal mystical as a Hindoo seer, vibrated in that rare brain. While his feet trod upon the grandeur of the Christian, so typifying his own glory, heart and face were Zionward, as befitted a lover of the Law and an implicit believer in the promise to Israel. An exile by Babel's streams, he looked in devoted hope and eagerness for the ultimate deliverance from the house of bondage when "the tribes of the wandering foot and weary breast" should again and for ever recover the long lost Canaan, returning victorious as when the might of Pharaoh was sunk in the Red Sea, and the dukes of Edom and the warriors of Moab were astonished. *Praise ye the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.* Alas! against that animating song had to be set "the lay of pearled tears," known to all the children of Abraham in all the Egypts and Babylons of their exile. Mr. Herstein knew the bitter and the sweet; but neither in gladness

nor in grief did he forget the ineffable dream. And meanwhile here was Rachel, his Rachel, effulgently triumphant when so many generations of the oppressors were in Sheol.

He marked how the eyes of the Gentile dogs gloated on that superb vision, and was hotly divided between gratification and resentment. They itched to have her. The fools. As well might the owl fix its amorous hopes on the eagle. Did they remember that she was of the immemorial race, and as her father's daughter would spurn the best of them from her foot? If she did not, if in a moment of infatuation she showed signs of yielding to honeyed deceit, would he not Jephthah-like strike to obviate the disgrace? He mingled with the Christians because it suited him so to condescend, but no words, even were they burning Hebrew, could express the height and the depth and the force of his everlasting contempt for them. And when he saw them paying court to Rachel, blandly, yet with more than the arrogance of Ephraim, a pink flush overspread his olive-bronze face. What were they so to presume? The purblind children of a nation which compared with his was hardly of yesterday, and would be like the upstarts of Tyre and Sidon when the chosen people should still be on the throne of the world. The walls of Jerusalem might be many times cast down; nevertheless they should be strong as adamant when the bones of the destroyer were dust.

An eddy of the swirling throng brought him face to face with his hostess, and the pink flush faded into a long smile. For Mrs. Cadwallader Roy turned aside a moment to praise Rachel, who was just then radiating in a circle of three, to wit, Mr. Asaph Savoury, who played host; an elderly lord, understood to be looking for a sleeping partner with capital; and a youthful baronet, newly succeeded to one of the oldest titles in the kingdom.

"My trump card," Mrs. Cadwallader Roy said sweetly, with a glance at Rachel. "All the men adore her, and"—she inclined her head confidentially —"a far greater tribute—half the women are furiously jealous of her. But there, I must not make you vain."

"You two talking business again?" Sir Sydney Dormer remarked, slipping up behind. "Shop's not permissible at social gatherings."

Mrs. Cadwallader Roy turned on him an arch inimitable look.

"We're talking," she informed him, "of the prettiest and cleverest girl in London. And that's a kind of shop men of taste always relish, isn't it?"

"And her name?" he inquired, bowing.

"Is not sister Anne," replied Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, sweeping him a look of intelligence from under long eye-lashes. "But since we three are so happily met we may as well do a little business. I was so much taken with our diversions in the East End the other day that, like the nigger with the buck-

wheat cakes, I'se gwine to have more. Will you two arrange another little outing, or shall I get you expert aid? Mr. Emmet's somewhere here; wait and I'll bring him."

Mr. Herstein would have declined the interview but she was off before he could protest. Her new amusement was to him a terror and a torture.

CHAPTER XVIII

FORTUNE AND FOLLY

UNTIL America arose with new standards of wealth and fresh devices in pleasure, England drowsed in the belief that she understood the full potency and magic of money. When that sustaining faith went down in the crash of demolished creeds, she comforted herself for a season with the thought that America was a creature of vulgar ostentation, addicted to barbaric show, and fatally cursed with a nasal twang and a high grating voice. But when one sprig of nobility after another crossed the Atlantic and brought the shocking vulgarity home with the family coronet on its brow, the old lady was forced to revise her judgment, though the act cost her fearful pangs and burnings of heart. With go, intelligence, and illimitable cash you may do anything, and America had all these. Poor old Britannia owned as much as she turned her lorgnette on the audacious, independent daughters of the West. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy was marked as one of the brightest, most particular stars who

had ever crossed the Atlantic with a cargo of dollars and diamonds.

To the surprise of multitudes, she came without a title. The multi-million heiress became plain Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, so that in spite of her riches people almost suspected a romance. In a matrimonial way, indeed, Lena Savoury could have had the pick of two continents, with the isles of the sea thrown in. She could, in fact, have commanded any honour short, perhaps, of mating on equal terms with a European in the running for a throne. The superstition which doth hedge a prospective king still inhibits the morganatic marriage. Some day it too will go the way of superstitions; then an heir-apparent may wed the woman of his heart, to the benefit of the state and his own domestic happiness. Perched on the golden apex of the world, Miss Savoury was a fascinating as well as a conspicuous object. Lest it should forget its greatness America periodically enumerates the first flight of its multi-millionaires, and in that magic list the name of Lucas Savoury stood near the top. Hence when a prospecting lord or princeling set foot on American soil to exploit a title on the money market, Lucas Savoury's daughter was naturally a luminous point of attraction. Moreover, she was blessed with a mother who, till death cut short a distinguished career, was a leader in the splendid band whose mission it was to reveal to the Republic the possibilities of its own social greatness.

You are not to suppose that in such conditions Lena Savoury was denied the full gratification of inherited position and native wit and beauty. A prince of one of the most illustrious decayed houses of Europe, not without hope in an oblique line, made a flattering proposition, begun in Paris and most gallantly pursued and pressed in New York. For so many millions settled absolutely on himself, a life interest in all his titles, nobilities, and honours would, in return, be settled on her. With a charming graciousness and a rare self-abnegation, she bowed the adoring prince out. "Marriages," she remarked demurely, "are made in heaven. I've had no intelligence that ours has been arranged in that High Court of the affections. It would be awkward if we made a mistake in such a matter," and turned with the grace of a queen.

Half an hour later the rejected royalty was found as if contemplating the ruins of an earthquake. "She has refused me," he cried in explanation. "She —an Americaine—refused ME. I go back a tousand years. Bah! she will be seek when she theenks."

"Thought she'd have cottoned to your headgear, prince," said a sympathetic American.

"I veel go and get another," declared the prince valorously. "I veel make another my preencess. There's others as goot."

"Not many," remarked the American thoughtfully, "can plank down a first instalment of ten million dollars."

After the prince she passed in review a long procession of nobles and aristocrats. It was the old song of "Jenny's Bawbee" over again, with elegant variations to suit an advanced age. Whether she divined as much is a matter of conjecture; but she made the danglers of titles stare aghast when almost without hint or warning she conferred her hand and her millions on Cadwallader Roy, a penniless British attaché, with a handsome face and figure, an engaging manner, and a boyish frankness in contemning riches. "Lucky dog," cried all America and the half of Europe. "That's the most savoury mouthful he ever swallowed. Lucky dog."

The envied of a world enjoyed his felicity for two short months. At the end of that time he left the prize to an undiminished fortune and the unencumbered freedom of a widow. A year and a day she mourned, and then, being a philosopher, stole back into the world. Her choice fell on London, partly from predilection, partly from the fact that she was charged with the domestic arrangements of Asaph, who took a house for her among the millionaires of Park Lane.

Time was when the warrior cut and carved empires at his pleasure and for his own benefit. Might was right, as certainly as guns were guns and swords were swords. Civilisation grew, and there came the sleek diplomat with the invaluable art of putting things. Sometimes when statesmen and other great persons thirsted too ardently for glory the dogs of

war were still unloosed to work havoc. But through all commerce was steadily advancing, urged by men's needs and ambitions. Argosies covered the seas; pioneers penetrated unknown forests and climbed unknown mountains for gain. Then in the ripeness of time came a new and splendid phenomenon, the international financier who, as deputy Providence, appropriates the earth and the fulness thereof. Shrewd men recognise in him the ultimate ruler of the globe, the consummate fruit of civilisation. The Savoury combination came eastward, reversing the ancient course of empire, put out its tentacles, and caught Sir Sydney Dormer, Mr. Herstein, and many more. For the ramifications of finance surpass in wonder the love of women, yea, are more puzzling than those four things which the wisdom of Solomon could not understand. And assuredly fate never achieved a stranger thing than when she switched Asaph Savoury and Israel Herstein into the same orbit.

Getting an opportunity, Mr. Herstein took Asaph aside, stated the unimaginable folly proposed by Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, and prayed him, by a brother's love for a sister, to thwart her. With graphic and trenchant eloquence he dwelt on the horrors of the slums, their filth, their disease, their ruffianism.

"She's to have Miss Herstein for companion, is she not?" Asaph returned. "I heard something of the project."

The Lord forbid. While Mr. Herstein retained

a shred of paternal authority Rachel should certainly not risk herself in the slums; and Mr. Savoury would be failing in his duty if he allowed his sister to go. Asaph pulled at his cigar, gazing at Mr. Herstein through the smoke with an odd expression, half surprise, half amusement.

"Oh! I guess Lena knows her way about all right," he responded. "She's been all over America. She's shot bear; she's hunted moose; she's taught Sunday-school. She's been among the Indians on the plains; also the daisies of the east side in New York, and I reckon that in pure, downright, unadulterated wickedness they'd give a few points to anything on this side of the water. Yes, sir, I guess that for genuine Satanic go the earth don't grow anything to beat the real east side New Yorker. And there's another thing you must know and remember about Lena—that ever since I was so high she did pretty much as she darn liked—especially if she thought there was an idea of preventing her."

"Ah! but this is dangerous, Mr. Savoury," persisted Mr. Herstein, under the cruel spur of fear. "Very dangerous and very foolish. You do not know our East End. She does not know it. Why does she want to go there?" he demanded suddenly.

"Ask me something easy, and I'll tell you," was the response. "I love and admire my sister, Mr. Herstein; but as to understanding her, why, she's Greek or Hebrew to me. Haven't time to fool

round that sort of problem. So Lena goes her own way, and I go mine. Best plan, I assure you. As to putting Lena off this projected picnic to the East End, I may not see her this evening. Both engaged. So many little things to arrange for this trip to Berlin. What I'm specially praying for at present is ten minutes alone with his nabs the Emperor."

Mr. Herstein's curiosity overcame his fear.

"The Emperor?" he repeated.

"Yes. Having important business, I guess it's best to go right up to the top storey at once. Besides, William's no fool. I rather admire William. For one born with the encumbrance of a crown on his head he's a hustler. I don't take much stock in crowned heads—a little like the curl in the pig's tail, you know, more for ornament than use. But William's got ideas. Yes, sir, William's there all the time."

A surge of family memories came on Mr. Herstein.

"Oh, yes," he admitted. "He seems to be there all the time, as you say."

"You bet; right smart man. Likes to boss, fancies himself a kind of senior partner to Providence, and all that. Hear he's composing a new Bible with the law of Moses amended to suit German needs. Well! I don't make any comment on freaks like that, so long's he gives me what I want. Say, Mr. Herstein," he went on in a changed tone, "this old Europe of yours wants re-organising about

as bad as any Betsy Jane that ever existed. Look at us. If we want to see the President we go right up and see him. There ain't any serried ranks of fifth-rate junior flunkies to pass before you get within hailing distance of your man. I'm beginning to understand why your national debt's so big in this country. By the way, if they knock twenty-five per cent. off by way of discount, shouldn't mind organising a trust to take over the whole show."

Mr. Herstein laughed as at an extravagant jest.

"Why not?" demanded Asaph. "It's got to come. Yes, sir, can't help coming if it tried. The day is coming, and now is, some time in the early morning, when America will step in and take over the old ship with all liabilities—just as sure's five dollars are worth an English sovereign—with something over. Only we must knock off pensions. John Bull's relatives are the costliest crew in the world. Well, I must get ready for Berlin. Ta-ta."

"You'll warn Mrs. Cadwallader Roy," pleaded Mr. Herstein, coming back with a jump.

"If I get a chance, and it's any use," Asaph replied, holding out his hand. "But I've told you what Lena is."

Mr. Herstein turned away sharply lest Asaph should hear him groan.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PAGEANTRY OF ALSATIA

AT one o'clock next morning a carriage and a hansom arrived from opposite directions before the Savoury mansion in Park Lane. From one stepped Mrs. Cadwallader Roy; from the other alighted her brother. As they went in together Asaph remarked sleepily, "Oh! by the way, Lena, while I remember, old man Herstein wonders what puts it into your head to go to the East End, and specially requests me to warn you what you're about. Struck me he was in a considerable bit of a funk somehow. Funny if he had other motives besides concern for you. He's of the chosen people, you know, and about as artful as they're made."

"Don't be stupid, Asaph," was the sisterly response. "You look tired. Get to bed, dear. All ready for Berlin?"

"Quite. Say, Lena, wish you were going with me as diplomatist-in-chief. In case of difficulty I believe you'd get round William. And, come to think of it, Emperors are kittle cattle, especially if they're dull and you've got to hammer things into them."

"As monarchs go William of Germany is not

dull," said Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, with conviction. "Now and again there's a touch of the high-falutin—probably due to want of spanking in his green and tender youth. But there's grit too. In America he'd make a fortune."

"Believe he would," returned Asaph, feeling that commendation could go no farther. "And it's something in my favour that he attends to business himself, and doesn't trust, on the British principle, to an incapable Court Chamberlain, who passes on the duty to somebody else, who in turn does a little delegating, till what between great chamberlains and secretaries of State and heads of departments and men and boys in buttons, the thing very effectually gets lost. But about old Herstein, treat him tenderly, Lena. Rachel's a dashed good sort of a girl, and I tell you what, many a high-stepping Gentile heiress would give ten years of life for her looks. Something good's come out of Nazareth this time."

"Kiss me, you naughty boy, and get off to bed," she responded not without hint of reproof. For some undiscovered reason a sister rarely goes into ecstasies over a brother's praise of another girl; and in this case even the unconventional Mrs. Cadwallader Roy had to admit there was a delicate question of race to be considered.

Nevertheless, as Asaph in his masculine way intimated, Rachel was charming, with the charm of wit, beauty, and just that touch of poetic sentiment which, in Mrs. Cadwallader Roy's judgment, make

the ideal woman. The critic, though still young, was old enough to discount the mere physical attraction, and to recognise the futility of a fight with time. "Youth will go in spite of you," she said once, not regretfully, but resignedly. "I have a dear friend, wild horses would not drag her name from me, whose son, for a mother's sake, bless him, all at once took a backward leap from twenty-two to seventeen. The poor woman absolutely refuses to cross the fatal forty line. So she oscillates between thirty-six and thirty-eight, advancing to that limit and then hurriedly drawing back in terror. Isn't it pathetic? But the wrinkles and the grey hairs are coming all the same to curdle her blood in secret and give her the lie in public. My dear, you mind what I say, the woman who lasts, the woman who has real power, even in the pride of youth, is the woman who has brains and knows how to use them, not the empty simperer who poses as a statue of beauty which may haply prove a magnet. Look round, who are the popular women —the women that the men run after?"

"The rich ones," said a cynic quietly.

'You're too trying for anything," she cried gaily, "and you're wrong. The really clever woman shall be queen in spite of Fate. If I found myself lapsing into dulness, I'd——"

She paused, and Sir Sydney Dormer started.

"I'd quit existence," she declared agreeably. "Personally, my ambition would be to revive the salon

on the old French lines. But where's the material in this land of mammoth gravity? Englishmen are too stupid," she swept Sir Sydney a bow, "and Americans too busy making money. The generation that's not busy has no brain left."

Rachel pleased Mrs. Cadwallader Roy because she had mental gifts and a taste for adventure. In the heroic times of her nation the slim, dark girl with the large soft eyes might have been a Deborah or a Miriam. Yes, and if she had married a Uriah by mistake and fallen in with a David there might have been a dramatic tale to tell. Men of taste and enterprise—but remembering Asaph, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy dismissed that aspect of the subject.

Asaph was in Berlin, palavering with an Emperor. Sir Sydney Dormer played the part of knight-attendant on his goddess, and Mr. Herstein was absorbed in the affairs of the Standard Metropolitan Bank. His turn as director had come to examine the bank's securities, whether held for advances or for safe keeping, and nothing he had done for years interested him so profoundly. With the rapt eagerness of a child over a new game he studied the tabulated statement of Mrs. Cadwallader Roy's wealth. What a woman to have for friend! Old Savoury had simply loaded her with gilt edges. "And when he dies," reflected Mr. Herstein, pausing in his reckoning, "she'll be the richest woman alive." His mouth watered. If Sir Sydney were wise; but to all appearance Sir Sydney was wise.

In the quest for knowledge Mr. Herstein likewise gave a close attention to the affairs of Savoury and Son, and Mr. Asaph Savoury, as a private individual, and his mouth watered afresh. For a moment he half regretted he had not made New York the scene of his operations. If he had to begin again—however, the Fates do not grant a second lease of life even to the most deserving, and on the whole things might be worse. Here he was behind the scenes, as it were, tasting the Savoury millions, he who had started in the ghetto. Verily the Lord was good.

While Mr. Herstein was thus giving seven hours a day to duty as a zealous bank director, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, all unconscious of his subterranean burrowings, was busy in other directions. Whence it came to pass that one day while he counted and cast in the Standard Metropolitan Bank, Beulah Place was surprised by a party of swells. Sir Sydney Dormer remonstrated with unusual warmth against the folly, but Mrs. Cadwallader Roy laughingly held to her purpose according to the prediction of Asaph. So he slipped a five-pound note for the police orphanage into an inspector's hand, sought the counsel of Mr. Emmet, and went forth bravely to guard Mrs. Cadwallader Roy and Rachel.

The excitement caused by the invasion would have been keener, but for the fact that Beulah Place happened that day to have a piece of pageantry on its own account. It was a funeral, a "function"

much relished and always tumultuously attended throughout the East End. Sal's baby, after one of the most valiant fights for life ever recorded of a starving, asphyxiated human mite, at last took its poor little fist from the mouth there was little else to fill, and ceased to stick a foraging head into pots and pails. Defeat came suddenly and when least expected, as its way is. Dolf was on duty in the absence of Sal, and Peter'j'n looked in on him, in the beaten way of friendship, munching a currant bun. At that festive sight the baby, calling out with its whole hungry being, stretched its hands for a share. Peter'j'n instantly passed the bun, and the baby's desperate efforts to swallow made the boys laugh. For at the first greedy mouthful it croaked and gaped and craned its thin neck, and made the absurdest grimaces and gestures. All at once, however, Dolf held his breath, for in the dim light he perceived that its face was black. "Chokin'," he screeched, "chokin'," and fled for aid. Passing the door of Peter'j'n's mother, he shouted a cry that was startling but unintelligible, and leaped on in his descent. At the bottom he collided with Mr. Emmet and a School Board officer.

"Ah! so you'd bolt, would you?" said the officer, collaring him, as an incorrigible breaker of School Board regulations.

"Let me go, you fool," screamed Dolf, tilting head-first into the pit of the official stomach. "It's the biby, sir—chokin'," he added, lifting a wrung

face to Mr. Emmet while the other recovered breath. Mr. Emmet was up through the darkness as it seemed at a bound, with Dolf hard behind. But when he reached the top Peter'j'n was bent over an inert heap of rags, exhorting it to eat the bun. Mr. Emmet took the child in his arms, doing what his knowledge of such cases suggested. "No," he said presently with a hard breath, "I'm afraid it won't eat any more bun. Dolf, run for the doctor, you know his address, and bring your mother: you likely know where she is also. Fast—fast."

Stealing away in awe, Peter'j'n crept down and reported to his mother that something very mysterious was the matter with Dolf's baby. Chris and the doctor were up together, and a minute later Sal arrived from the Cherry Tree, very moist and greatly excited. Her baby lay on the unmade bed which Mr. Emmet had smoothed down, and Sal collapsed beside it. When the state of the case was explained to her she staggered to her feet declaring her intention of "doing for" Dolf on the spot.

Mr. Emmet put forth a hand. "Sit down," he said sternly. "Sit down, and try to get sober."

She obeyed with a drunken cluck. "I ain't boozed," she retorted, as if prepared to argue; but remembering she had a dead child, she dropped into tears and husky outpourings of affection.

"Just loved it more'n my own life," she blubbered. "S'elp me Bob, I did. Oh! dear, wotever shall I do?"

"Hold your tongue and take care of that body until you hear from me again," Mr. Emmet answered with unwonted curtness.

So the doctor made his report and the emancipated baby was carried round the corner to a back apartment of the Cherry Tree, where a coroner's jury found that the deceased had choked on a piece of currant bun supplied by Peter John Heath, because being ravenous from hunger it ate too greedily. The said Peter John Heath, having acted from good and charitable motives, was entirely exonerated from blame. But with the verdict of "death by misadventure" was coupled a rider severely censuring Sal, and expressing the jury's clear opinion that had she done her duty as a mother, had she fed and washed and housed and attended her baby properly—in a word, had things been different, then certainly things would have been different, and the chances by long odds were that the baby would not have died as it did. The coroner added his official concurrence as well as some sage and independent remarks on the natural and inevitable effects of drink, neglect, starvation, dirt, overcrowding, and incidental evils which slum babies have to encounter in the battle of life, a battle which to most of them is short and very sharp. All these things accomplished according to law, the baby was carried back to its old garret, there to lie in state while Pickens, as head of the house, roused the neighbours to the proper pitch of interest, and

made the funeral arrangements. When the Mayfair party arrived he was distributing funeral cards to friends and sympathisers who had subscribed to the burial fund. With great glee and affability Mr. Pickens welcomed the new comers.

"Fun'l, mum," he explained to Mrs. Cadwallader Roy. "An' 'ere's the card all right an' proper—yes'm."

She accepted one, and read the inscription.

In Loving Memory of Little Dora, Aged Two.

Till the day break and the shadows flee away.

"All right, ain't it, mum?" said Pickens politely. "'Till the shadders flee away'; there 'e are, mum, the printer's own idear, an' I call it a good 'un. Penny each if you please, mum. We're 'bliged to charge strangers wishin' to join in an' 'ave a soovnir, cos ye see plooms an' all that truck comes expensive, an' Sal's mighty perticular."

"Sal is the child's mother, I suppose," said Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, handing over a shilling, with an intimation not to mind the change. Pickens's cap went up instinctively.

"Oh! bless 'e, yes'm," he answered gravely through his smiles. "An' she do take on 'bout it, she do an' no mistike. Never in all my life seed anybody so cut up 'bout a kid, an' that's a fact."

The entrance of Mr. Emmet interrupted the conversation. Pickens delicately retired, while the clergyman exchanged brief greetings with his friends;

then he was conducted upstairs; and in the sordid foul room, in the midst of London's savagery, which is many degrees worse than that of Pacific Isles, the minister of religion, kneeling beside the dead, returned thanks because a little one was taken home so soon from unspeakable misery and snares that were too strong for weak feet, and pleaded that God would not enter into judgment with such as forgot His commandments. Save to one Hearer he knew that his words were well-nigh meaningless, that those about him listened in amused curiosity or disdainful indifference. But he did not hence think the prayer less necessary, nor make it less fervent. Finally, the little coffin was carried down under a man's arm, and with tawdry pomp deposited under the draggled hearse plumes. The Mayfair party watched from a recess.

"How horrible," said Miss Herstein. "Oh! how horrible. Poor little mite."

"And it died of starvation, dear," returned Mrs. Cadwallader Roy softly.

"I think," said Rachel trenchantly, casting an eye from the grotesque group about the hearse to the hovels behind them, "I think that the people who are responsible for such a place as this deserve the worst judgment of Heaven."

"Not so loud, Miss Herstein," whispered Sir Sydney.

She turned, and caught the eye of a man who had evidently overheard, and was studying her in grim interest. It was Tom Meckles.

CHAPTER XX

MECKLES COMES TO BUSINESS

AS if the heavens themselves wept in pity, rain began to fall, increasing swiftly from a shivery drizzle to a drenching downpour; and Beulah Place became an inky puddle of cesspools and squelching mud. Every wall streamed grime, every step was in slush; a thousand blended stenches rose chokingly like plague-fumes; the very rain was liquefied smut. Wondering how anything human could exist in such a pollution, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy and her friends fled, using handkerchief and smelling-bottle. Sympathy and interest have sharp limits. As the nymphs who went out to console Prometheus on his rock returned in the evening dejected and harrowed in sensibility, so Mrs. Cadwallader Roy and Rachel could not abide Beulah Place in the normal dreariness of rain and mud. They therefore tucked their dainty skirts and went home Felix-like to await a more convenient season.

Mr. Meckles went out of his way at least a hundred yards to see them off; then he returned purposefully,

tramping through the rain and sludge, as if it were positively the most exhilarating exercise man or nature had ever devised. As a matter of fact, Meckles had no thought of the offensiveness of liquid mire, composed for most part of decaying matter. Born and bred in it, he had never lost the relish for his native element. It had squirted between his toes, warm or cold, according to the season; it had spattered him from the crown of his head down; he had spun his agile body a Catherine wheel in it; and it had always agreed with his health. He liked its satisfying odours and adhesive ways, and, liking, grunted disdainfully over the horror of toffs and fine ladies. "Pity they hurried away so suddint," he said to himself, thinking of the Mayfair visitors. "Cos if they'd stayed awhile they'd forgot the mud in the fun of watchin' things a heap livelier nor fun'rils—yes, a heap livelier."

When he re-entered the court the crowd which gathered for a spectacle had dispersed, all save the professional loafers who, being impervious to eccentricities of weather, take rain, hail, snow, sleet, or frost, if not with equal thanks, at any rate with an almost equal degree of sullen indifference. At a signal two men stepped forth to meet him, and he paused a moment to speak with them in a low, earnest voice. Having received instructions on what seemed to be a matter of importance, they retired, nodding acquiescently, to their shelter; and Mr. Meckles, pursuing his way, disappeared by the door

leading to the room of the Heaths. Dolf, having been denied the funeral outing, happened to be scouting on the stairs, and gave a whoop of alarm. Peter'j'n had just time to pop inside like a rabbit into its hole and bang the door fiercely behind him when Meckles reached it. The boy held valiantly on the inner side: but his puny strength was hardly felt by the man.

"Come," growled Meckles, pushing the door before him. "None of yer impudent dodges. I've had about as much of your cheek as I can stand."

At these words Chris started forward, a living terror in her face. Peter'j'n, gripping her gown to give confidence, gallantly turned on the intruder.

"Well!" said Meckles, thrusting forward his face, and looking round the room, "whyn't ye out'n this, eh? Past yer time; ought to 'ave been out an hour ago. Come, make tracks."

For an instant Chris's throat was too racked and dry to articulate; then, with a dizzy head and the gulp of one choking, she managed to say, "We're willing to pay the advance."

"Oh! ye are, are ye?" Meckles responded with a sneering laugh. "But s'pose I ain't willing to take it? What then? Fact is, I've had enough of you—and a little over. Yer room and not yer money or yer company's what I want now."

"We'll do all you want if you let us stay," Chris gasped, her mouth twitching in anguish.

"Ye got notice to quit a week ago, and that

notice is expired," Meckles returned. "I want this room just as quick as ye know how to get out."

Chris was panting in mortal agony. Peter'j'n could feel her trembling. She always seemed to tremble when this man came, and it was time to intervene definitely.

"If you do anything to my mummy," he said, looking with blazing eyes into the purple vindictive face above him, "I'll——"

His mother's frenzied hand shut off the threat.

"I'll kill you," he cried, wriggling free, "and so will daddy."

Meckles paid no heed; he had not come to wrangle with kids.

"Where's yer 'usband, that he ain't helpin' ye to clear out?" he demanded roughly.

"Looking for a job and a room," Chris replied, hoping the information would soften him.

"Ah!" said Meckles scoffingly. "Sort of man does two things at once. 'E'll get on, 'e will. Well! I reckon there's lots of jobs knockin' round London, and lots of rooms too. Come, make haste and get off to some of 'em."

"For God's sake have mercy on us," Chris cried out distractedly. "We'll do anything—yes, anything you want—if only you'll let us stay on."

"Mummy, don't cry," said Peter'j'n, his rosebud of a mouth quivering. "Don't cry, mummy."

Mechanically she drew him in close, her eyes fast on Meckles.

"If you tell the landlord that—that we're ready to pay the advance," she said, the tremor of desperation in her voice, "he'll have pity, and let us stay."

The notion was too comical for Mr. Meckles, and he laughed outright.

"That's good," he returned. "D'ye 'appen to know him? Lor! bless ye, 'e's just runnin' over with pity for the likes of you—can't contain it. Only in this case what I say 'e sticks to as a matter of course, d'ye understand? And what I've got to say is this—get out in double quick time, unless——"

"Unless?" she cried, holding her breath.

In her frenzied anxiety and eagerness she fancied he was thinking of fresh conditions, and she would agree to anything, anything that would keep a roof over her children and her husband.

"Unless ye want me to 'ave the trouble of puttin' ye out," he answered.

She staggered as from a blow, but instantly recovered through sheer necessity of acting.

"Here," she cried with a dry sob, producing a torn purse. "Here's money—take it. A week's rent in advance. Take it; take it."

For perhaps the first time in his life Meckles drew back as if money would burn or contaminate.

"I don't want yer money," he returned brutally. "I want ye to get out'n this, and the quicker ye go the better it'll be for ye. I ain't come for an argiment, take my word for that."

She was desperate. What though he was coarse

and cruel, what though he insulted her, trampled on all her womanly feelings? It was not herself she had to think of, but her husband, her children, her innocent, helpless children. God have mercy on them.

"Ever since we got notice," she went on, as if she had not heard his repeated order to go, "my husband has tramped himself nearly dead lookin' for a room. Yes," she added, as if sure the piteous tale would melt him, "tramped till his feet gave out." But she had mistaken her man.

"Give him an appetite," was the callous response.

She stared at him in a kind of dazed appeal. When we are in agony, when the strained heart seems to be cracking, we think the darkened world ought to halt or turn aside in sympathy. The world passes by, heedless as the priest of scripture, and the sense of its inhumanity is often the sorest pang of all. Meckles had not the smallest intention of allowing himself to be lured to compassion or concession. Revenge is sweet, especially when it falls appositely in the way of business and profit.

Chris was thinking of Jim out in the rain in search of work, in search of shelter for her and the little ones, begging for leave to toil, seeking like a lost soul some refuge, garret, or cellar he could call home. When he went forth in the morning, more like a man broken on the wheel than the Jim she used to know, she had vowed to herself that she would plead with the agent, not

letting him go till she conquered. Everything would be sacrificed for the one terrible, terrifying need. Once she had dared to say they were paying too much for their corner of a hovel, paying double and treble what it was worth. She would say so no more. To get food and clothes was nothing in this awful famine of homes, this choice between the street and the workhouse, between death from exposure or death from disgrace.

She was egregiously wrong in imagining that any plea or pleading of hers could move Meckles from his purpose. He came on business; he meant to see that business through, and incidentally to sweeten it with revenge. Her appeal might just as profitably be addressed to the heart of the nether millstone.

"Your room's let," he announced bluntly, "and the other tenant's waitin' to get in. 'Tain't any use talkin'."

For a moment it seemed that Chris must swoon. The next, however, a new hope was thrilling through heart and brain. She would try bribery; others bribed, why shouldn't she?

"I suppose the room's for the highest bidder," she said, smiling as one may smile in the acuteness of anguish.

Meckles gazed at her out of half-closed eyes. Ho, ho, she was learning.

"A thing generally goes to the highest bidder, don't it?" he returned. "I'm offered two bob more'n you're payin'"

"I'll give it," she said frantically, her heart stopping for the response. There was no thought of too much rent now.

"Two bob I'm offered," said Meckles slowly, "and two pound more key-money."

Watching narrowly, he could see the mortal tremor his words sent through her.

"Two pound," she repeated, as if the spirit were all at once gone out of her.

"That's the figure if ye want to outbid," said Meckles. "I'll make the rent half-a-crown more, and the key-money two pound ten."

Chris fell back with a moan; she had not two pounds ten.

"All right," remarked Meckles. "Needn't waste time. Come, get ready."

"Can't we wait till my husband comes back?" she asked piteously.

"No," replied Meckles. "Ye can't. Time's up and more'n up. I've fooled 'bout enough with you."

The passion of the tigress at bay seized Chris, making her head hum and her arteries dance. "Then I won't go," she cried defiantly. "You come here to frighten me when I'm alone with the children. Do your worst—you brute—you bully. I defy you."

The speech was tragic in its foolishness, as she realised almost before the last word was uttered. But heart and brain were delirious. Meckles regarded her with a malign smile, his eyes contracted, his lips

drawn tight over the teeth that were presently to be bared.

"Oh! ye do, eh?" he retorted. "All I've got to say then is this, that I give you half an hour, and not one second more, to clear out to the last stick."

Chris seemed to totter backward; then all at once she sank to the floor in a convulsion of dry sobs. With a cry of sharpest terror Peter'j'n stooped, clasping her frantically round the neck.

"Mummy, mummy, mummy," he called, the childish voice choking in the gush of tears. "Oh! mummy, what is it?"

Meckles snorted in derision. He knew all the tricks of tenants. Nevertheless, he withdrew hastily, lest the sight of that excruciating woe should melt him to leniency. As he went the baby too began to cry.

CHAPTER XXI

DOLF PLAYS COMFORTER AND FINDS A COLLEAGUE

DRENCHED, dead-weary, heart-sick, and cold with fear, Jim returned to the spectacle which his terrified imagination had for weeks been picturing with hideous vividness—his wife and little ones desolate in the rainy street among the débris of household goods. Meckles had kept his word to the last jot and tittle. Promptly at the end of half an hour he was back with his "chuckers-out" and in a little while the room was empty. He had no thought of troubling himself about an ejectment order. If the ejected desired worse things to befall them they would make a fuss; if not they would take their fate in meekness and submission. Sooner or later experience taught the most refractory that lesson—a circumstance which saved Mr. Meckles both time and money. Wherefore the Heaths were bundled forth in the customary way. They had hardly passed the threshold when their room was full to overflowing, as though Constituted Authority

had never stringently forbidden overcrowding, nor decreed a minimum air-space for each of the wallowing atoms of Alsatia. Authority might indeed decree air-space, but in view of its cash value per cubic foot Meckles preferred to be his own law-maker. The thing paid like compound usury, and the risk was nothing.

Chris, descending as in a nightmare with Peter'j'n and the baby, met the incomers on the stair, frowsy foreign Jews chattering guttural Yiddish, and exhaling all the malodours of Jewry. Next minute she and hers were in the gutter. The thing they feared was come upon them. The possibility which had made them shudder in the watches of the night, which they dreaded more than disease or starvation or death, had become reality. In the place of multitudinous homes they were homeless; discarded human wreckage trampled in the mire of a London slum.

When Jim's eye fell on the huddled group his heart died within him. In other days the sight would have fired him to a delirium of anger; even six months before his pulses would have been as drums beating to action. Now the pith was utterly gone out of him. Cowed and broken, he crept abjectly into the shadow of ruin. But for love and shame he could have turned and fled to hide his crushed hopes, his piteous futility, and sense of irremediable disaster. God pity him, he had come to London to conquer, to gain independence, and be a man. London

received him like a blind monster taking a fresh morsel on its tongue, and having chewed him limp, spat him out as refuse.

Peter'j'n, crouched on the soaked straw mattress in a bootless effort to keep warm, espied his father, and with a cry of glad confidence sprang to meet him. Daddy would soon put all right : daddy would astonish the plunderers. Peter'j'n never doubted that ; but when he marked daddy's limp step and grey, haggard face an awe never felt before struck into his vitals. With a swift and terrible intuition he divined that the fates were somehow too much even for daddy ; and he shrank back astounded and afraid. Chris rose as her husband advanced.

"They've come," was his tragic greeting.

"They've come, dear," she answered valiantly trying to keep a steady lip. And then, as if to keep from breaking down, she asked what her heart told her there was no need to ask, "Any luck, Jim ?"

He shook his head. "No," he replied, heart-break in his voice. "No luck."

He dropped on the wet straw mattress, covering his face with his hands. Chris, gazing with strained eyes, saw his shoulders begin to heave convulsively ; and of all the pangs a woman knows none is comparable to that torture of watching the man she loves sobbing in the agony of defeat. Falling on her knees beside him, she seized his arm, her own welling tears suddenly frozen in a new dismay.

"Jim," she pleaded, "dear Jim, don't take on

like that. See, we're all here together, Jim, and we'll get a place and keep together. There, dear, there, you're better, aren't you?"

Peter'j'n crept close, and furtively began to clap his father's bent head; in the same instant Dolf whispered in Chris's ear.

"Give 'im that, Missis 'Eath," he said, nodding at Jim as she looked up. At the same time he thrust the cheapest of cheap cigarettes into her hand. He had received threepence as his share of the funeral spoil, and like a man spent it on tobacco, with a demand for quantity rather than quality. Jim lifted a distorted face.

"'Ave one of 'em, Mister 'Eath," added Dolf cheerily. "Keep 'e warm; keep 'e from feelin' 'ungry. I ain't bin a bit peckish since gettin' 'em. Turks they be. See the bloke in 'is bags. Seems to 'ave separate petticoats for each leg, 'e does." He held out a battered package with the counterfeit presentment of a gentleman in fez and wide breeches whiffing sublimely. "Good strong 'uns they be," pursued Dolf. "Made three fellers sick's a cat with the measles on 'em already—you'd die larfin' to see 'em a-holdin' of 'emselves." He gave a pantomimic representation of a green smoker in the throes of his folly. "It was just splittin'."

Jim had taken the proffered cigarette mechanically; Dolf struck a light, dexterously shielding the flame with his hands, and before Jim knew he was smoking.

"Ye ain't alone in this bally pantomime," Dolf

remarked almost joyously. "There's our sticks over there," jerking his head at a litter ten yards away.

"Have you been turned out too?" Jim asked dazedly. On coming in he had had no eyes for any misfortune but his own.

"Wot d'ye think?" responded Dolf. "'Tain't likely as I'd fetch them things out inter the rain for fun, is it? All your sticks out, Missis 'Eath?" he inquired politely.

"Yes, Dolf, they're all out," Chris answered dolefully.

"There ain't much chawnce of cookin' to yer mind 'ere, is there? 'Ave that."

From a recess somewhere in the back lining of a recently acquired jacket he brought forth a piece of strong-smelling pastry, and passed it to Peter'j'n. "Bin out for it, or 'ud 'ave seen ye sooner," he explained. "Course Peter'j'n don't smoke," looking at Chris, "not yet. Don't do kids of 'is age no good. Why, Mister 'Eath, yer a-lettin' yer Turk go out."

He struck another match, and held it towards Jim within arched palms.

"And what are you going to do now, Dolf?" Chris asked, unable to get away from her own pressing trouble.

"Lord only knows, Missis 'Eath," Dolf answered, tramping the match underfoot. "Depends on the new dad. Must wait and see wot 'e does. Shouldn't be s'prised if he was to bash in the other bloke's

'ead, and if so," he added, flicking the ash from his cigarette, "'e'll be took for certain. Impossible t' say wot'll 'appen."

The sound of a quick, purposeful step came from the rear, and Dolf turned a questioning face, which instantly broke into a beam of welcome.

"Good-aternoon, sir," he said cordially. "Kind of cold an' drippery, ain't it? an' a jolly mess 'ere to the bargain."

"Yes," returned the new-comer, looking round the strewn remnants of furniture. "I should think very cold and drippery indeed in your present condition."

"Oh! s' far's that goes," rejoined Dolf, with an air of profound experience, "I've 'ad it wuss'n this, 'eaps wuss. 'Member onct when I 'adn't nothin' to eat for two days, an' no snoozin' box but bally arches, and that only when there was no copper round."

The new-comer made some remark, not in surprise, and moved foward to investigate. Dolf knew him as the big friend of the little St. Patrick, a brother parson, in fact, who ran some sort of mission in a back street, where food and clothing were occasionally to be had for nothing, if one made one's plea with sufficient skill. As to his denomination or the colour of his creed, there prevailed a general and blissful indifference. But he was rapidly becoming known as a recently arrived Samaritan with a Scots tongue, the breezy jocund manner of uni-

versal brotherhood, a superb physique, and a muscle not to be trifled with. His designation officially stated was the Rev. Drummond Dalrymple, M.A., B.D., but in and around Beulah Place it was merely "the Scotch 'un," in contradistinction to "St. Patrick," or "the Irish 'un." He now came hot foot on information incidentally received from Miry in a chance meeting among the streets outside. Dolf as a personal friend, and the most self-possessed of the evicted, explained the situation, and gave a succinct account of anterior proceedings.

"Ever been turned out before?" Mr. Dalrymple asked. The question was general; but Dolf promptly took it to himself. "Rather," he replied, as if evictions were among the chief pleasures of life. "Bless 'e, this ain't nothin', this ain't, when yer used to it."

"Used to it," repeated Jim with pained intensity. He could never get used to it.

"Yes," rejoined Dolf. "Lookin' back—makes me peckish to think of it, an' cold—whew. You may think this is cold, but, bless 'e, Mister 'Eath, this is 'ot-'ouse weather beside wot I've knowed."

"And how did you live, Dolf?" Chris asked with a shiver.

"Best I could, Missis 'Eath. Sometimes I slep' under arches and bridges, and sometimes under nothin' at all. One night I slep' in a dustbin, an' that was jolly warm, I tell 'e. Smelled wuss'n a bust gas pipe; but I didn't mind that. When I wasn't dodgin' the perleece for forty winks I was scootin'

round for grub. Sometimes they ketched me, an' I 'ad to wash up 'an go to school."

"And you didn't like it," remarked Mr. Dalrymple, who knew boy nature intimately from a teaching experience of five years.

"No," returned Dolf emphatically, "I didn't. I didn't want none of their bloomin' 'rithmetic an' stuff. Ain't got no call for it s' far's I can see. Say," he cried with a grin, "wot d'ye think? One day teacher told us sun'thin' 'bout bread a-growin' on trees. But I knowed jolly well 'e was kiddin' us, so I arsked if he could tell me any place where fried tatters an' sosiges growed on trees, 'cos I'd like to go there. You should 'ave seen 'is fice."

"What did he say?" asked Mr. Dalrymple softly.

"'Tweren't 'zactly wot 'e said, but wot 'e did," replied Dolf thoughtfully. "There was fifteen minutes' interval for wallopin'. 'That's 'ow sosiges an' fried tatters grow on trees,' says 'e, layin' on. 'All right, sir,' says I, 'if ye don't mind,' says I, 'I've 'ad enough of 'em.'" He laughed quietly to himself, and then turning to Jim with sudden gravity, said, "Wot are you purposin' to do, Mister 'Eath?"

Jim started. "I don't know," he returned, a ghastly fear again in his eyes. "I don't know."

"Well! take my advice," said Dolf, "an' don't go to the 'Ouse. Keep clear of it, though you 'hain't got nothin' to eat nor no place to snooze in. The 'Ouse is 'orrible, that's wot it is. I was there onct,

an', I tell 'e, you don't ketch me there again s' long's I've legs to run away."

In the vernacular the House means the Workhouse, and it is loathed more than magistrate or jail, more than sickness and hunger. Jim leaped up like one into whom an arrow is shot.

"Don't let that worry you," said Mr. Dalrymple, laying a soothing hand on his arm. "I think we may find a way of cheating the House. Yes, I think we may."

Jim gazed in a kind of stupefaction; but from Chris there came a sudden cry, a cry of choking gladness and gratitude, and before he could prevent it, Mr. Dalrymple's hand was at her lips. They were not to perish; they were not forsaken, as she thought. He came in their extremity, a messenger and saviour from God Himself.

CHAPTER XXII

FOR THE HIGHEST BIDDER

IN the same moment Constable O'Ryan sauntered into the court at the regulation pace, and, in a palpable embarrassment, advanced to the outcasts.

"I'm mortal sorry," he said apologetically, addressing Jim, "but I must be axin' ye to be afther gettin' thim bits av things out av the way. 'Tis agin the rules to have the strate blocked."

He gazed at the broken figure in acute commiseration. The pain of having to fling out destitute and clinging misery, of playing cat's-paw to tyranny, had driven him out of the ranks of the Irish Peelers. He crossed to England, hoping to be for ever done with the outrages of eviction, and lo! here on the back door step of civilisation, at the rear walls of the very headquarters of religion, avarice and oppression hurled forth their rifled victims. And this was worse, much worse, than anything within his rural experience.

"In the counthry, God knows," he remarked, in an aside to Mr. Dalrymple, "'tis bad enough to have yer pockets full av imptiness, yer wearin' apparel

composed mostly av holes, and just the wide sky for a roof; but in this den av thieves an' bone-pickers 'tis a considerable stritch on the wrong side av purghatry."

His sympathies were wholly with the derelicts; but as a member of the Metropolitan Police force receiving twenty-eight shillings a week, to say nothing of the pension in prospect, he must needs see to it that wretchedness should not be allowed to cause an obstruction. The law permits hearts to be broken, but forbids the scandal of leaving the débris in the street.

"I'll just be lavin' thim to you, sorr," Tim added. "And will ye be spakin' to thim to move on? The crathurs is that heart-broke they wouldn't care if I arristed thim fifty times over. And d'ye moind whisperin' frindly loike in their ear that if me sergeant comes along there'll be the divil to pay, whether there's anything to pay him wid or not."

With that he turned to go, calling blithely over his shoulder, "Ye'll be afther hurryin' up now loike good childer, and not catch cowld sittin' round there in the rain."

Outside he met Mr. Emmet returning from the funeral, and briefly stated the position of affairs.

"They're sore broke in there, sorr," he said. "Sittin' loike draggled hens among the rimnints of ould nests, and it's the holy truth I hadn't the heart to move them on. I was tellin' the six-fut Scotchman from round the corner that's in charge they'd

better be lookin' out for me sergeant. Are the beraved comin' home? They're kicked out too."

"I lost sight of them on leaving the cemetery," replied Mr. Emmet.

"Celebratin' as usual," commented Tim. "Most ginirally their keening's done to a public-house tune. Fun'ril, weddin', foight, or family picnic, it's all wan great thirst in the end. Well, if they celebrate too much certain belongins'll be sowld chape, that's all."

With an affable farewell he pursued his beat, and Mr. Emmet hastened into Beulah Place. Simultaneously the two clergymen saw each other, and saluted like brothers, Mr. Emmet declaring "this" was good of Mr. Dalrymple, and Mr. Dalrymple avowing "it" was nothing at all, and less than nothing. Whatever unbridgeable gulf might exist at headquarters between State religion and Nonconformity, there was neither division nor disparity in the field. For, happily, Percival Emmet and Drummond Dalrymple thought little of creeds or high-fenced church enclosures, and much of the duty to humanity in distress. A moment they conferred in an undertone, and Dolf drew near on the tip-toe of curiosity, his cigarette held behind his back from some dim feeling of reverence for the Church.

"See'd any of my folks, sir?" he asked Mr. Emmet, cocking his head upward in a comical gravity.

"Not since leaving the cemetery," was the answer.

"Soakin', I should think," Dolf remarked, with

a deeper intuition than Constable O'Ryan's, and went off to inform Ben they must endure the uncertainty of Fate a little while longer.

But almost immediately he crept back again to hear the tale which Jim was relating tragically to Mr. Emmet and Mr. Dalrymple. Alas! to them it was a too, too familiar tale of famine, failure, and desperation. In the foggy dawn, after a sleepless night, Jim had gone forth on his quest, hoping against hope to be the fortunate early bird. On a moderate estimate he had tramped twenty miles of weltered pavements, often racing till he panted, sometimes reeling in disappointment and weakness, but ever holding on in that slum frenzy of house-hunger which is worse than common starvation and all its brood of evils. He had interviewed nearly half a hundred house-agents, desperately offering them all his wealth for any hole or nook, be it in cellar, garret, or back yard, that would shelter him and his, pressing it upon them in a wild-eyed eagerness, pleading with them almost in sobs for God's sake to take his money and have mercy. He was soon wet to the skin, dabbled with mire to the knees, streaked with running soot; but he knew nothing of that, nor did he give any heed to blistered feet, though in his running he limped from pain.

At every agent's a crowd of the famine-stricken pressed distractedly, and he thrust into the frantic throng as fiercely as any. In one instance he arrived

just thirty seconds too late; in another he had giddily emptied his pocket for key-money when a women yet more furious and a trifle richer rushed in screeching an offer of ten shillings more than he had laid down.

"Veel you go dwenty sheeling more?" the clerk asked him in accents made in Germany.

"It's all I've got," was the gasping answer, "I was first—take it." He pushed the money a little further forward.

"You veel nod go dwenty sheeling more?" rejoined the clerk, unmoved.

"Course 'e won't," cried the woman, trembling with excitement, as she wiped a face oozy with rain, smut, and exuded gin. "'E can't afford it. Things in this world's for 'em as can afford 'em. Now make haste, there's a dear," coaxingly to the arbiter of fate behind the counter. "Five kids awaitin' on the stairs, bless their 'arts, 'cept they've bin chucked since I left 'em, an' ole man in 'orspital, bad leg, m' dear, an' youngest jest three months. 'Ad to put away the best bedroom soot for key-money," she added with hysterical humour, as if a jest in the midst of trouble might soften the heart and expedite the fingers of the arbiter. He took no heed; with a statement of rent and conditions of tenancy, he methodically made out the necessary order.

"Oh! there won't be no bother 'bout the rent," she assured him. "Sat'day night punctual's the clock of St. Paul's; yes, m' dear."

The arbiter glanced at her in silence. She might keep her mind easy: he would see to that.

All at once the vehement beating of Jim's arteries seemed to stop. The place darkened and heaved like a drunken ship; for in matters of life or death it is sorer to touch success and fail than never to have touched it at all. Half a minute he steadied himself against the counter; then, with the rejected money clenched in his hand, and a keener despair in his heart, he staggered forth into the street. It was in that moment his eye caught the gleam of the black river which has so often put an end to calamity. Dazed and bewildered, he walked towards it, vaguely wondering what the sensations of the plunge would be. Suddenly he turned in a chill of horror, but ever afterwards he fancied he understood the mood in which men leap or strike to be rid of the burdening gift of life. The incident was not related to the listeners in Beulah Place.

From agents for tenement hovels he turned aside in his despair to the guardians of block dwellings. None of them, to their universal regret, could afford succour offhand, but they afforded sympathy in profusion, and politely promised to remember him "as soon as anything turned up." In consideration of these favours to come he disbursed sundry coins from a poor store, which were accepted on the principle of Scriptural secrecy, as though in taking no less than in giving the deeds of the right hand

should be hidden from the left. Without exception, they also took his address, in order, as they explained, to communicate with him at the first whisper of a suitable vacancy. The irony of taking the permanent address of a homeless outcast penetrated even his wretchedness, but from habit he named Beulah Place. These courtesies accomplished, they delicately led him out, stood a moment in the doorway at sympathetic attention ; then, facing about, straightway forgot him in the interest of new applicants and fresh tips.

In a deepening slush and a numbing dejection he resumed the quest among hovels. At every rallying point, which is to say, every agent's office, he ran into famished, draggled, vehemently importuning crowds. Now that all his own feelings and faculties were concentrated on one desperate aim, it seemed that half the world of East London must be in similar straits. He was realising, too, with a swiftly increasing bitterness that the direr the famine the greater the harvest of the sweater and his agent. It was incredible, save on the sharpest proof of experience. These parasites throve on affliction, grew fat and sleek on poverty, flourished like a fungus on social disease and distress. So were things ordained in Christian England. He tramped leagues of streets, traversed scores of teeming courts and alleys, asking the question that ever received the same answer, pleaded with callous agents till his throat was raw, and he was made of less account

than a dog. Was there a conspiracy against him that he was thus rejected with contempt by men whom he would hardly have deigned to kick in the days of his pride?

That he harboured any such fallacy proved him still an egregious novice, or perhaps an incurable egotist. What was he that his half-crown should be preferred before another man's five-shilling piece? Did the poor lunatic fancy that landlords existed to dispense charity? Or was he of those who hugged the ancient superstition that every child of Adam is entitled by right divine to a portion of the general inheritance? The economic principle judges such questions, and the economic principle had ages ago ruled that belated absurdity out of court. If the later and more intelligent mode of government squeezed and pinched at times, and at times crushed and tore, these things were essential in the interest of the rulers for whom Providence indubitably designed the earth and the fulness thereof. As a reasonable being, he must admit that. Besides, was there not the satisfaction, the exquisite satisfaction, of having companions in misfortune, of finding others equally destitute, and perhaps even a trifle more miserable than himself? He might take it as a fact beyond dispute that most of the pariahs aud Ishmaelites who scrambled and fought like delirious fever-patients were much older than himself in the art of subsisting on nothing, and taking sweet rest minus parlour or bedroom. It was true as

Holy Writ, and somehow, to his untutored mind, the fact seemed an aggravation of the general wrong.

A majority of those who contended in that clamorous running fight were women, women with headgear and without, women with the matted, tangled hair of savages dripping over eyes and shoulders; women whose clothes hung on their bodies so perilously they seemed to be perpetually on the point of dropping off; women with children in their arms, and clinging to their skirts; women who pleaded piteously; women who wept silently, and fainted in the struggle.

The two clergymen listened in silence. The story was but a variant of what they heard every day, almost every hour of the day. They had, indeed, heard worse, but in the present instance the anguish was excruciating because the feelings were still fresh. For the Heaths had not yet fully undergone the induration of slum-life, had not mastered the stoicism or apathy which takes misfortune or hardship as the natural lot of man. Jim threw off his tale with the rough fluency and vigour of kindled feeling, but immediately on finishing he subsided again on the soaked straw mattress. Mr. Emmet asked gently what he meant to do. "I don't know," he answered without looking up. "I don't know."

"Had anything to eat?" was the next question "No. I thought as much. Well, if you're going to live, you must eat. Take this card to the housekeeper at the Vicarage—with your wife and children."

He included Dolf, but at that Mr. Dalrymple intervened. "You leave the boy to me," he said. "And you'll go with the others yourself. Don't protest, please. You're wet, and it might be death to stay here. I'll keep sentry for a little."

"Rain doesn't wet you, my friend, eh?" cried Mr. Emmet.

"A poor imitation of a Scotch mist is harmless to one who has known the real thing," was the response. "Now I must ask you to be off, please, the lot of you. You know my address, boy: take this ticket to my landlady, and she'll give you something, anything she may have hot and handy."

With that he bowed them forth as one having or, what was the same, taking authority. They were hardly gone when Meckles, in the exercise of a multifarious duty, appeared in the court-mouth.

CHAPTER XXIII

FACTS AND PHILOSOPHY FROM MECKLES

HE marked that the "sticks" still lay where his men had thrown them; but not as a fact with which he had any further concern. "Sticks" and people were now passed on to the police, who were paid to deal with obstructions. In such affairs Mr. Meckles held to the just and admirable principle of yielding those who receive the pay the added pleasure of doing the work.

"'Ope they like it," he said to himself, thinking of the evicted with a feeling akin to the arch enemy's over the primal eviction from Eden. "Wonder where they've took themselves off to now? Boozin' likely." And he made a mental note for future use that those who could afford to squander money on drink could, and should, afford to squander a little more on rent. There were secret profits to be considered now; extra percentages for the judicious concealment of knowledge. Fondling a stubbly chin, Meckles thought with a delicious satisfaction of the unexpected ways in

which fortune plays into the hands and pours into the pockets of her darlings. The keeping of secrets might be made the most lucrative part of his calling.

Having a minute to spare, and some stirrings of curiosity besides, he advanced to ascertain what the new parson with the outlandish Scotch accent had to say for himself and his cloth as professional busybodies and intermeddlers in general. At bottom his judgment of such men was fixed. They were officious lunatics who invaded the slums with pap, ignorance, impudence, and rose-water sprinklers as means of grace. He could not quite decide whether he took their intrusions with contempt or resentment. At first it was resentment, hot and malign, but gradually the feeling veered to contempt, and except in the sudden variations of gusts and storms, had settled at that. Their aim, as Mr. Meckles understood it, was to raise the fallen, comfort the wretched, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, cleanse the filthy, make the drunken sober, the thievish honest, and the lazy industrious. "To make 'em good an' 'appy," he put it with lightnings of scorn. "Well, all I've got to say is this, they've got a mighty big job on hand. 'Eard as it ain't all beer an' skittles washin' niggers white."

It was in the spirit of such thoughts that he approached Mr. Dalrymple, to whom he gave a rough greeting, half insolent, half jocular, remarked the unsatisfactory state of the weather like a true-born

Briton, and referred with an incidental air to the "sticks" and their owners. Mr. Dalrymple received him as a brother and ally.

"They're in sore need, the poor beggars," he said, as if certain of Meckles's co-operation in helping them. "You're just the man to get them out of the fix. You'll do something for them, won't you?"

Mr. Meckles stared a moment in surprise, and then shook his head.

"Can't," he said; "full up."

"Packed?" asked Mr. Dalrymple.

"Crammed, top, bottom, an' middle. 'Ardly got room for an extra red 'errin'. If you can find so much's a vacant hole in the wall to put 'em in, you shall 'ave it for nothin'. There. Vacant room," cried Mr. Meckles, as the absurdity of the thing dawned on him more clearly. "Lor' bless 'e, I could let every room I 'ave twenty times over—yes, fifty times an' more; an' if I was to partition every room into two and the two into four an' the four into eight, an' so on s'long's a foot of space was left, I should still 'ave more tenants'n I wanted—'eaps an' 'eaps more. My trouble is not to get 'em in, but to keep 'em out."

"Yes, I suppose that's true," said Mr. Dalrymple.

"Oh! ye needn't be s'posin' nothin' about it," rejoined Meckles, with a coarse laugh. "It's as true's anything you preach. Ye may take my word for that. Only last evenin' some people implored me to let 'em sleep on the stair of the very 'ouse

that we're standin' opposite this minute, planked down the coin too, tu'pence a head ; said they'd paid a penny a night for takin' a snooze leanin' against a rope stretched across a room ; but would rather pay tu'pence for a respectable stair, seein' they 'adn't cash enough for a fourpenny doss, not to mention the Billinsgate chicken for breakfast. Course I couldn't. But you see the demand. Vacant room," repeated Mr. Meckles, in boisterous merriment, "ain't got so much as a vacant rat-hole to let. Bless 'e, tenants just dote on these 'ere sweet-smellin' places ; love 'em like dear life, they do."

"And have to pay for them accordingly," Mr. Dalrymple observed quietly.

"Judgin' from their actions they 'pear to be pretty willin' on the whole," retorted Meckles, with a grin. "If you'd bin with me an hour ago when I was lettin' ten feet by eight round the corner, you'd 'ave seen 'em trippin' each other up an' crackin' each other's ribs to get in. Your friend Heath was there in a mortal funk because 'e couldn't go one better. Key-money stumped 'im. Reckon 'e ain't just so free with 'is fists this arternoon."

"Key-money's on the boom, isn't it?" remarked Mr. Dalrymple blandly.

Meckles became suddenly grave. He had learned from Mr. Herstein to mask his feelings when the temptation to vaunt was strong, and especially to abstain from foolish elation over profit made out of others. That was the fatuous Gentile method

which begot jealousy and roused opposition. The safer plan was to take the favours of Heaven humbly, as just rewards of merit and a fair return on capital invested. If the master was wise the disciple was singularly apt.

"Yes," he admitted cautiously, "I ain't denyin' key-money's bin goin' up. But so 'as rates an' taxes an' cost of repairs. An' tenants is gettin' that pertickler you wouldn't believe. Must 'ave things just so, or there's a row."

"Ah!" said Mr. Dalrymple, in so ambiguous a tone and with so ambiguous an expression that Meckles felt a momentary inclination to take offence. It passed, and he resumed.

"Take these very people," pointing at the furniture of the Heaths, as if each article were separately and individually responsible for the owner's delinquencies. "They were never done a-grumblin'; the more ye tried to please 'em the wuss it was. Did a lot more than the law meant ye to do, an' they grumbled just the same; couldn't satisfy 'em. An' when after mountains an' oceans of trouble I went finally to put things straight, what d'ye think they did?"

"I heard about it. They were wrong," said Mr. Dalrymple, thinking it prudent to eschew questions of chivalry and attacks on defenceless women and children.

"Wrong," repeated Meckles fiercely. "So ye may say; so any reasonable, fair-minded man 'ud

think, wouldn't 'e? Come to set things ship-shape and get knocked down for yer pains! That's gratitood, ain't it? An' yet," he went on, not in the tone of pious martyrdom, "I do believe some folks think I was treated right an' proper, an' got what I jolly well deserved for doin' my duty an' not lettin' the Heaths alone. Ye know what the old moke of a magistrate did?"

Mr. Dalrymple nodded.

"'E's a beauty, 'e is," commented Meckles, with a curling lip. "Oughter be in a Sunday School feedin' kids on lollypops an' teachin' 'em to be little sneaks an' apron-string saints, an' let justice go to——"

"Quite so," interpolated Mr. Dalrymple suavely. "We know where she is driven to take refuge at times."

Another retort had sprung to his lips, but by a miracle of self-control he kept it back. His policy was to humour not to contradict or ruffle this man, who for the moment represented a power that was almost despotic. He ventured, however, to adduce the plea that even magistrates are human.

"Oh! mighty human," assented Meckles quickly. "Chuck-full of the sort of human nature that suits 'emselves. Don't matter about other people: all right so long's they're 'lowed to preach an' get their pay."

He paused, as if challenging denial or contradiction. As neither came, nor, indeed, any response whatever,

he deflected abruptly to the cause of vexation. "Them Heaths is from the country, I believe," he said. "Don't like people from the country; don't know nothin' an' give 'emselves the airs of a whole 'Ouse of Lords, under-strappers an' 'angers-on inclooded. To 'ear 'em talk ye'd think they were accustomed to marble 'alls an' chicken an' cham. In London 'ere they expect palaces and flunkeys to attend 'em—all free, gratis, an' without cost."

"They're disappointed, aren't they?" returned Mr. Dalrymple, dashing the rain from the brim of his hat.

"Well," laughed Meckles, "those of us that's responsible may be decayin' in intelleck, but we hain't reached the point of pure idiocy yet. Though if this sort of thing goes on," he continued dolefully, "I ain't at all sure 'ow long some of us can 'old out. It's a worryin' business, I can tell you. Just look at this blessed nonsense 'bout over-crowdin'. Why, I can remember the time when nobody bothered their 'eads 'bout over-crowdin'. Folks got jammin' 'emselves in rooms just as they liked, 'arf a dozen to the square yard if they wanted; an', if you ask me, the world was a heap jollier nor it is to-day."

"But didn't pay quite so well," suggested Mr. Dalrymple.

"Oh! I don't know 'bout that," returned Meckles. "An' there's another thing, an' it's this, that I don't think all the blessed rules an' regilations they're introdoocin' is benefitin' the people much; no, nor

I don't think that toffs an' fine ladies, who know 'bout as much of slums as a chiny bull knows of white-washin', are much good either. They come round 'ere 'oldin' their blessed noses 'cos the street puddles ain't made up with lavender water, an' the stairs washed with odo colone, an' look all s'prised an' put out 'cos the in'abitants ain't sailin' round in purple an' lace an' guzzlin' cake an 'old ale; an' they cry out, 'Oh dear, dear, 'ow 'orrible,' an' 'Can't nothin' be done?' an' 'The authorities oughter know of this.' So they fuss 'emselves red in the face, an' after a while along comes a snipe of an inspector of noosinces an' makes jottin's in 'is note-book, an' next day a clerk sends a letter signed by somebody who don't know enough to write 'is own name so's anybody can read it, sayin' as we must do this an' that an' t'other thing immediately, if not sooner, an' if not, God 'elp us, cos they won't 'ave no mercy. An' what's 'appenin'?" cried Meckles, with a ringing derision. "Why, this—that, spite of all their boards an' clerks an' regilations an' big pots, as empty in the 'ead as a coster's donkey 'fore breakfast, the over-crowdin's wuss to-day nor ever it was before; yes, out of all reckonin' wuss."

"Unfortunately that is true," admitted Mr. Dalrymple.

"Yes," pursued Meckles, banging his clenched right fist into his left palm, "an' it's goin' to be a 'eap wuss nor it is now, you take my word for that. For what's the fact? Why, this—that the people's

flockin' in 'ere from everywhere, an' must be stuffed away somehow. The law forbids 'em to sleep in the street, s'posin' the weather's suitable, or perform their t'ilet in public; that 'ud be too shockin'. Likewise it 'unts 'em off door-step as vermin, an' from below bridges and arches. They dussn't lie about in alleys, passages, or backyards, an' if they're ketched on stairs where they've no right to be it's ho! for Black Maria. Well! you 'unt the foxes from cover to cover an' they crowd into their holes just as long as the holes will hold 'em. An' d'ye think ye'd induce 'em to turn out by holdin' meetin's an' passin' resolutions, an' settin' a whole pack of 'ounds to bark an' carry on outside? Gah! I tell 'e that sort of thing ain't wuth that," and he cracked his fingers in disdain.

"And all the landlord does is to take in the highest bidder, and as many of him as he can," remarked Mr. Dalrymple.

Meckles burst into a loud guffaw.

"What d'ye think?" he cried. "Human nature, ain't it? 'Bout as human," he added, "as givin' fust place for glory to them as pays best."

He contracted his eyes to mark the effect of that home thrust, that justification of the sweater by the example of the Church.

"You interest me immensely," Mr. Dalrymple responded, in the even, friendly tone he had maintained throughout. "And, by the way, a curious thing occurs to me as the result of what you've told me, that I don't even know who owns this place."

Involuntarily Meckles closed one eye, as if to indicate he was too cute to be drawn.

"No," he answered with a chuckle. "The owner 'pears to be too modest to stick 'is name on a brass-plate on the front door. Ullo," he broke off, turning sharply. "You hollerin' again, eh?"

Dolf had dashed in, exclaiming that the sergeant was coming, and the obstruction must be cleared off instantly. Mr. Meckles paused a moment to consider, then remarking amiably he must be "off," made way for the law.

CHAPTER XXIV

PICKENS ON THE WAR-PATH

WITHIN half a minute Dolf was off again, a tattered Mercury pelting through mud. His orders were not merely to carry a message, but to bring aid and effect a rescue promptly, lest the law should be offended and Constable O'Ryan compromised. Luck was with him. At least three minutes ahead of the sergeant, a coster's equipage clattered into Beulah Place, Dolf, a miniature image of Jehu, astride the shafts and encouraging the donkey with the buckled end of a belt under vehement protests from the owner. "Double pay, old man," responded Dolf, and laid on the "crawlin' moke" the harder. Hence, when the majesty of the law appeared escorted by Constable O'Ryan—very stiff and grim from the stern sense of duty which excludes private feeling or considerations—Mr. Dalrymple and his assistants had already half the furniture in the donkey-cart.

At his next meeting with the minister Tim remarked sympathetically, "Ye twigged me tippin' ye the wink, sorr. Ye can't be explainin' everything

to yer sergeant, and what he doesn't know will do him no harrm at all in the worrld. Besides, there's some things that as a mimber av the force the rules don't allow him to onderstand, d'ye see, and this 'un bein' fresh on his promotion must have eyes all over him, back, front, sides, top and bottom. Afther a while he'll be seein' less, an' there'll be more comfort wid him."

"Thank you, constable, you put us quite at ease," Mr. Dalrymple replied cordially.

"'Twas a ticklish kind av job to kape the baste roight," said Tim, "and him out paradin' wid the express purpose av' makin' reports, havin' nothin' better to occupy his moind. It was only just be chanst I contrived to send ye word be the bhoy. Sharp little spalpeen that, sorr. I axed him onct if he fed reglir on needles, and he answered me back as grave's a judge givin' the death sintince, no, 'twas a mixtir av pen-knives and razor blades. 'Then,' says I, 'a change av diet does the best av us no harrm at times. There, go and get yourself a bun.' We've bin as thick as pirates ever since. If I was thrainin' detictives, I'm thinkin' I'd bring thim up on quarter rations same's him."

When the law had passed the time of day and departed, in the conviction that the obstruction was disappearing with reasonable celerity, Dolf followed craftily, lest in its mean sleuth-hound way it should double back. One could never be quite sure of anything in uniform. Peering round one corner he

saw the two men turn another, and then all at once he gave a great cry.

"The new dad," he called, in a tingling excitement, "the new dad."

Next minute like a true born Englishman entering his own demesne, Pickens appeared a yard and a half in advance of Sal, thus delicately differentiating the rights and relative standing of the sexes. It was plain at a glance that the pair had effectually succeeded in drowning their grief, as well as all thought of possible happenings in Beulah Place during their absence. Pickens oozed mellowness and old ale, while Sal bubbled festively with "white satin," a spirit of divers ingredients, chiefly gin. She was laughing thickly over some occult jest, when suddenly her lord stopped.

"Why, Chawley, blest if I didn't nearly run inter ye," she cried in the rear. "Wot's up?"

He pointed fatefully to the donkey-load of "sticks" and the litter on the pavement, which included Ben and the bald-headed chaffinch. Sal was quickest to interpret signs and omens, not because she was the soberer, but simply because her material interest happened to be the greater. With a fierce imprecation she darted forward. "The low mean 'ound," she cried furiously. "Oh! the sneakin" dirty 'ound to come an' do this when we was at the fun'ril. Was there nobody 'bout to bash in 'is 'ead for 'im?" she demanded, as if one might well do so much for a lady in distress.

Pickens took no notice of the question. He was thinking of other things. Striding forward with tight lips and a kindling eye, he gripped Dolf.

"'E done it?" he asked hoarsely.

"'E did," answered Dolf eagerly.

A moment Pickens stared at the boy angrily; then turned with a mystified air to the dog.

"Don't understand it," he murmured. "Left Ben to keep 'ouse. Don't understand it."

"Oh! Ben weren't no use," Dolf explained breathlessly. "Man just tipped 'im over, so." He imitated a body helplessly thrown.

Pickens glared as if the statement were a personal affront. "Wot," he retorted fiercely, "no use?"

"No more'n if he was a monkey," said Dolf emphatically. And in a few burning sentences he told the incredible tale.

"Take that dog out'n that," Meckles had ordered in opening the proceedings, and Dolf had replied with glee, "Take 'im out yerself. 'E ain't my dawg."

"Afraid he'd eat ye, eh?" Meckles asked derisively.

"'E do be given that way a bit," Dolf rejoined seriously. "No more'n two days ago 'e glued on to a bloke's leg an' the piece 'ad to be sawed out to get 'im off. 'Fore that a little while he chawed up a feller's right arm same's it was a sosige. Another time 'e was ketched dinin' off a cat's-meat cove that 'ad given 'im sauce. No, thankee, I ain't dyin' to be worried, not by a long chalk."

"Wot a nice little boy you are, to be sure,"

Meckles rejoined in yet keener derision. "Ye oughter be under a glass shade, you ought. Where d'ye get yer vittals, sonny? Well, since yer in a funk with yer own dog, get out'n the way."

Then Dolf witnessed a thing which, on his word of honour, he would not have believed possible save on the evidence of his own infallible eyes. Meckles advanced as if courting a fight, and of course Ben sprang like a hero, his great jaws open for the grip. With the swiftness of lightning Meckles stooped and darted out a hand, and as sure's there's mud in the Thames Ben went over on his back with a thud. He seemed to be stunned by the surprise, but gathering himself bravely, sprang again. Dolf was horrified to see him go down as before, this time with a distinct note of pain, or fear, or both. But he was of good English blood, and a third time he turned and leaped upon his adversary. Dolf, holding his breath for the issue, almost pitied Meckles. But once again that demon hand went out, and once more Ben struck the floor head and shoulders together, this time with an unmistakable yelp of terror. Meckles looked at him an instant as he withdrew, crouching into a corner; then he turned to Dolf, remarking, "I fancy 'e's 'ad 'bout enough. Now, boy, will you take 'im out, or shall I turn 'im loose?"

"I took 'im out," Dolf ended, "an' there 'e is."

Pickens bit his lip; the pride of his heart was disgraced.

"Did 'e 'pear to do sunthin' to Ben's foreleg?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Dolf, "that's just wot 'e done."

"Ah!" said Pickens ruefully. "Owned dawgs 'imself onct; must 'ave."

Only an expert could throw an attacking bull-dog. As a trainer the feat was familiar enough to Pickens; but he could have wagered the price of many drinks that he was himself the only man in Beulah Place who could have brought Ben to grief in that particular way. The question now was which should be kicked, the man or the dog? He decided like a Briton and a sportsman. The dog was hardly to blame; the man must have the kicking. Wherefore, ordering Dolf to set Ben at liberty, he announced his intention of seeking and finding Meckles if all the caves and caverns of slumdom had to be explored. Sal first tried to dissuade him; then, with the fidelity which clings through rivers of blood, vowed she would go with him. That suggestion, however, Pickens curtly put aside, remarking that business should come before pleasure. It was useless to argue, and she knew it. So she contented herself by calling out as he retreated, "So long, Chawley. Take care of yerself, an' see 'e don't get in the first blow." But the real thought of her heart was, "If I lose my man through him his eyes will certainly come out first time we meet." Then, as one who has done the State a service, and is entitled to reward, she turned to the puzzled

Dalrymple with the question, "Wot yer proposin' to do with me now?"

Helpless and in woe, she was on his hands. It was his to comfort her with meat and drink, likewise to provide lodging, and would he have the goodness to observe she was waiting? As a full and satisfactory answer did not come immediately, she kicked a piece of sacking into place on the doorstep, and, subsiding in a heap, gave an absorbed audience a husky recital of her wrongs, with lurid intimations of the horrors to ensue in the time of revenge. It was as if the spirit of vengeance, frowsy and full of rage and liquor, her bursting garments an agglomeration of filth, her bonnet askew, her wet locks matted, her face an epitome of evil passion and long-endured misfortune, took to spouting maledictions to a congregation of the lost. Looking and listening, Mr. Dalrymple carried his fancy to the little grave in the paupers' plot, soaking desolately under its first day's rain. Ah! on how many days and nights in the countless years and æons to come should rain fall on that forsaken spot, sifting down through the clayey darkness to the poor pickle of dust beneath. Ay, and while the rain drenched forgotten graves of murdered children the roaring Babylon of the many hells would still have virulent abandoned women to blaspheme the sacred name of mother, and make a mockery of the awful solemnity of death.

A flush of anger passed hotly through him. It was Sal and her disreputable kind who turned human

habitations into dens of the infernal. For an instant he could have throttled her in her infamy. Then suddenly the anger gave place to a feeling of shame and humiliation. Were Sal and her kind the real sinners? Who made them the pest and the curse they were? Who in greed and the spirit of usury took advantage of their ignorance, their need, and their suffering, driving them distracted into debauchery and crime? Was it not often men flattered by society, honoured by the State, ay, and blessed by the Church as for their double skill in serving God and mammon?

With a hot face he helped to pull and tie the rotten, many-knotted rope with which the coster was securing his load. As he gave the last twist about the shaft some one touched him on the arm, and, turning quickly, he looked into the beaming face of the Glasgow man.

"What, Davie, you here?" cried Mr. Dalrymple, giving the clasp of an old friend.

"Just as ye see," was the answer. "And what for no? This is a traivellin' age. Men go up and doon the earth like the very auld ane himsel'. So ye've landed in the metropolis like the rest o' us. I heard ye were here, and couldna go by without looking in. Miry heard it from the minister man she's kind o' thick wi'. She's come to look after some of the fowk here. I've brought her wi' me. Miry," he called, "this is Mr. Dalrymple that I've told ye about."

Miry suitably acknowledged the fact, and the Glasgow man went on—"D'ye mind the leatherin' ye gave me yon time in Glasgow for—for doin' what I shouldna be doin'? Many's the time I think of it. I hope you're keepin' up yer muscle, sir. Ye'll need it a' here."

They were diverted by a colloquy between Miry and Sal. "Bin chucked, hain't ye?" Miry was saying, not softly nor wholly in a tone of regret.

"Yesh," replied the woman on the doorstep, with a hideous grin, and with maudlin hiccoughs was proceeding to restate the circumstances of her martyrdom; but Miry promptly struck in—"We ain't dyin' to 'ear 'bout yer privit affairs. If ye ain't too much worried, or too much sunthin' else to walk, ye can come along o' me."

"Miry," cried the other, scrambling to her feet, "I allus said you wuz a good gel, allus, s'elp me Bob. Yer arm, m'dear. Legsh fair gone with trouble, m'dear."

"There, now; needn't be so bloomin' 'fectionit," returned Miry, as Sal lurched heavily against her. "'Tain't becomin' before people."

"Ha, ha," gurgled Sal thickly. "He, he."

Miry gripped the limp arm as in a vice. "Come on," she said resolutely. "Now then, mind them groggy pins of yours. I'll tell ye 'ow we get along, sir," she added over her shoulder to Mr. Dalrymple.

"Yesh," cackled Sal. "She'll tell 'e 'ow. Do'f, you mine the sthicks."

"A good girrl," remarked the Glasgow man, "to fash wi' a drunken auld runt like that. And she doesna do it out o' love either; but just because Mr. What's-his-name asked her. I'll be steppin' after them. The auld ane's gey and far through, and Miry might need a hand wi' her."

"London sweetheart, eh?" said Mr. Dalrymple, meaningly.

"Hoots," was the response, "what's a man without some sort of a lassie for his thoughts to run on? They're a bother and a worry whiles, but as God has given us nothing better we maun try to be content. Good-bye the now; I'll be seein' ye again."

"Good-bye," said Mr. Dalrymple, "we must certainly see more of each other."

Ten minutes later the combined Heath and Pickens furniture, with Dolf perched royally on the top, was on its way to the little Scots mission.

CHAPTER XXV

A MORAL FROM ANCIENT HISTORY

PICKENS did not find Meckles. In truth, after twenty minutes of a languishing quest, he neither tried nor wished to find him. By instinct he went to a neighbouring street over which the offender was known to exercise control, and there, as chance decreed, fell in with old friends and business associates. It was a street with a lightsome name and an evil reputation. Vernal Avenue inspires thoughts of sunny brightness, with gleams of scarlet and green in the season, and Memnon music in the dawn awakening happy citizens to congenial duties. Such ideals please the imagination. But fact and Borough Councillors are not imaginative. The name was a stroke of grim irony on the part of the unconscious satirists who bestow nick-names on London streets. There was no suggestion of greenness in Vernal Avenue, no gleam of flowers, no Memnon strain when the first sun-rays, piercing the dingy shroud of fog and smoke, struck into its darkness. For the things of the morning, sunlight and dew and distilled fragrance, it cared less than

nothing. It went to bed in the small hours long after midnight, and rose when it felt so inclined. At noon it lay behind drawn blinds: towards three o'clock it thought of breakfasting. While other streets bustled and worried over questions of work, of food and raiment, Vernal Avenue slept heavily. Because of these and divers other eccentricities, its traits, acts, and modes of life were recorded with loving minuteness at police headquarters. Sometimes the records were consulted with dramatic suddenness, and then an alert press had usually the felicity to look out its biggest type and chronicle a sensation.

For, like all great metropolitan institutions, Vernal Avenue had foreign relations, though not a word of them was ever breathed in state policy; and these frequently had results affecting many distant parts of the country. At such times detectives came and went with a great air of business and mystery, and less frequently these visits also had results leading, *via* the Old Bailey, to such retreats as Portland and Dartmoor.

The immediate issue of Pickens's meeting with old "pals" was that in the dead of night he visited the Scots mission secretly as a lover under ban, and finding things exactly as he expected, removed certain of his belongings. Next morning, being sober and in her right mind, Sal also paid a business visit to look after her warehoused goods; and when she missed the bald-headed chaffinch,

with certain small instruments stowed for security in the very heart of the mattress, she knew they need not expect him to breakfast. "'Ear as my 'usband's been called inter the country," she told Mr. Dalrymple.

"Indeed," was the response. "The call seems to have been sudden." And his expression made Sal remark privily to herself afterwards, "Pretty cute the Scotch 'un. Knows a 'eap more nor goes on inside churches, 'e does."

Pickens, as we have seen, did not find Meckles, but meanwhile Meckles found Mr. Herstein, and in fifteen minutes the pair blithely settled the fate of fifty more tenants. Despite the depressing mugginess, despite murkiness and squalor, despite the ingratitude of the poor and the difficulty of securing a reasonable profit out of them, despite a hundred hindrances to felicity such as slum lords and their agents alone have to endure, the two evinced a most remarkable cheerfulness and good humour. With an exquisite sense of fun Meckles described the eviction of the Heaths, his adventure with the Pickens' bull-dog, and other diverting incidents in the coming and going, the surging and ebbing of the tide of tenants, and Mr. Herstein chuckled appreciatively. A wonderful man, this Meckles, a real marvel in executing the schemes of superior brains. At the close of the recital, Mr. Herstein softly hoped there had not been too much fuss, too much noise or protesting on the

part of the victims. Meckles was able to set him perfectly at ease on the point. The Heaths came forth limp, the dog tail down, and Pickens was absent—burying a kid, Mr. Meckles rather fancied. Everything was quite satisfactory—as to fuss, quite satisfactory. "Don't you worry, sir. I know how to deal with 'em," Meckles assured him. "Wish I could deal in the same way with the passons. Of course they had to be meddlin' and nosin' round."

All at once Mr. Herstein's face darkened.

"Ah!" he said; "these men do not love us, Meckles; they do not wish us well."

"Don't matter much whether they do or not," rejoined Meckles with a snort. "You may take my word for it, sir, the world wasn't made to please them? no, and it ain't run to please 'em either."

"But they may do us harm, Meckles. They have tongues, and tongues talk. They have brains, and brains plan; and tongues and brains together are—are dangerous, Meckles. They stir up opposition; they work revolution. A tongue is like a match, it may start a great beeg fire; a brain set going is like an earthquake, it may shatter and wreck. The people—bah—you do as you like with them. They do not know, they have not intelligence; but if the clergymen come, saying 'You are wronged, do this and do that,' it is a deeferent thing."

Meckles cast a look from under gathered brows at his master. Was he losing his nerve? Or what was likelier, was there something behind that timorous

speech? Meckles knew his employer too well to judge him hastily. There were times when Herstein certainly looked the fool, but experience taught that precisely at such times appearances were least to be trusted. It was prudent, therefore, to reserve judgment pending developments.

"No," repeated Herstein, with conviction; "these men are not with us. They search Scripture for words to hurl at us. They denounce, they revile, they imitate the holy prophet Isaiah, as if they had verily got a rag of his mantle. Perdition to them. I hate them. But," Mr. Herstein lifted an admonishing forefinger, "but we must be very careful with them, Meckles. Give an enemy no catch, that is the best policy. One of them, it is that Mr. Emmet, has been watching, and has spoken his thoughts concerning you. I gather that he does not love you, Meckles."

"Should be sorry if 'e did," responded Meckles viciously.

"I remember his predecessor," said Mr. Herstein reminiscently. "A good man, Meckles, though not of my faith. Let others alone, and did just what he was paid to do."

"I remember him too," cried Meckles. "Bless 'e, I've cleaned his windows as a kid."

"Have you indeed?" returned Mr. Herstein, with quickened interest. It was a touching coincidence that in the days of obscure toil, when the stress of circumstance compelled him to accept crumbs from

the Gentile's table, he had himself cleaned the windows of St. Emmanuel Vicarage. Much had happened since then, praised be the Lord; but he had a long memory for the time of poverty and humiliation.

"Yes," Meckles went on, "and occasionally, when there wasn't nothin' better to do, I used to look into his church when 'e was holdin' forth. No overcrowdin' there, I can tell ye," he commented with a gurgle. "It was a case o' cuttin' the cackle and comin' to the hosses with him, which is to say, hurryin' 'ome to dinner. Then he smoked and let things alone, as you say. Made a bishop, or sunthin' of that sort, as a reward. Church knows what's what. Don't believe this 'un'll ever get promotion."

"No," returned Mr. Herstein; "he'll stay to trouble us. Keep an eye on him, Meckles, and also on this new one you mentioned. They're——"

"As bad's an Egyptian plague," said Meckles.

"Good, Meckles. As bad's an Egyptian plague. Well, you keep an eye on them, Meckles."

"You leave 'em to me, sir," replied Meckles, his fists doubling instinctively. "There's a place in Vernal Avenue I 'alf thought of lettin' the Heaths have because of the big Scotch 'un's pleadin' to-day. They sha'n't have it now, an' p'raps that'll teach the lot of 'em a lesson."

Mr. Herstein gazed at his lieutenant in amazement and alarm. With all his cunning Meckles was but a child after all, to seek revenge like a bull in a

fury, without prudence or policy. That was characteristic of the English. In strength they were as elephants, in courage as lions; but in intelligence, in craft, ach, they were as asses or silly infants. It was an Englishman who made Shylock exclaim, "'Tis my humour." Shylock in reality would never have been such a fool as to endanger his own interest by planning revenge. He were no son of Abraham to do that. Further inquiry elicited the information that if the Heaths were not admitted to the place designed for them in Vernal Avenue those in occupation would remain undisturbed. That would be ridiculous, inasmuch as it would mean the loss of extra key-money. To be wholesome and profitable, tenants should be kept moving like the sea. So he pointed out gently but persuasively the error of his factotum's way. Prudence, he remarked, is the better part of all proper schemes of revenge. Patience, pliancy, and persistence, these are the winning virtues. He comes out victor who bides his chance. Mr. Herstein himself had suffered grievously at the hands of oppressors and enemies. Providence had removed them all. After five-and-twenty years not one of them was left in his path. Most of them were dead, while he, Israel Herstein, was still warm with life. Some of them were in jail, while he, Israel Herstein, was at large turning the world to his own account. Some were paupers, while he, Israel Herstein, was rich. With the art of a true teacher he illustrated the lesson thus:

Once upon a time there was a man far stricken in years, and he had two sons. Before going hence he yearned to give his first-born an especial blessing, for he loved him more than he loved the younger. The young man was to go forth, get venison, and bring a savoury dish of it to his father as a token of filial affection. On the eating of the meat was to follow the blessing. But he was hardly gone out to kill when the younger, at the instigation of his mother, slew a kid, nay, it was two kids, prepared their flesh in the manner most to the old man's taste, and presented his offering while the elder brother was yet out hunting. Now the elder was red and exceeding hairy, while the younger was smooth as a girl. The colour mattered nothing, since the old man was blind from age; but his fingers could distinguish between hairiness and smoothness. Wherefore his mother clad the younger in kid-skin, keeping the rough side out, and thus arrayed he went in to his father and got the blessing.

"Pretty cute dodge, sir," put in Meckles.

Mr. Herstein smiled. Was the advantage gained by violence? Was it not a triumph of subtlety, of prudence, of policy?

Meckles grinned.

"Rather," he admitted. "Reckon there'd be a jolly row when the big brother got back."

"The other did not stay," replied Mr. Herstein. "But having secured the blessing, went off to his uncle at a great distance, and there got great wealth

and honour, yea, the fat of the land, corn and wine and herds and flocks without number. Yes," continued Mr. Herstein, his manner becoming animated, his eyes beginning to glow, "and better than all that, it was promised to him by Jehovah that the nations shall bow down to his seed; and, Meckles, I tell you that in spite of hardship and persecution over the face of the whole earth, that promise is coming true this day."

"You hain't mentioned his name, sir, have you?" Meckles asked, pricked to a lively interest. Mr. Herstein took no notice. Truly the name was precious, but more precious and far more apposite was the example; and on that pivot of wisdom they swung back to the problems of Vernal Avenue.

"I ain't at all sure them Heaths has got the necessary cash," said Meckles, as in justification of his threat to exclude them.

"There are still pawnshops, Meckles," remarked Mr. Herstein, regarding him curiously.

"There are," admitted Meckles, "if there's enough to put away. Vernal Avenue ain't just the cheapest snuggery in London, is it?"

In fact it was one of the dearest. How it managed to make ends meet may seem a mystery to the uninitiated. There are many such mysteries in London, yielding fabulous returns. It toiled not, neither did it spin, neither had it money in the funds nor shops with names over the doors. It had no apparent trade nor visible means of subsistence, yet

it paid an exorbitant rent punctually, and never haggled over key-money. Beulah Place was good, but Vernal Avenue was as a reef of pure gold. It was therefore an object of particular concern to Mr. Herstein. For the instruction of his deputy he played a mental game of chess, explaining the moves as he went, and in the end it was found that an unlighted black cellar could be cleared on the proper conditions. Into this, after some delay, the Heaths were admitted, finances being put right in the manner so thoughtfully, so delicately suggested by Mr. Herstein.

CHAPTER XXVI

NEW BLOOD; MR. HERSTEIN BLUNDERS

THE observant and intelligent foreigner has frequently remarked the dreadful sufferings of England from *ennui*, and has thoughtfully suggested the cause of disease. He notes that she dines somewhat heavily, especially that she drinks copiously, and hence he deduces reasons for the exceeding, the proverbial sadness with which she takes her pleasures. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, making her own observations of national tastes, customs, and idiosyncrasies, gaily put the case thus:

"Everything within the English border goes by precedent—everything from a baby's first frock to the apostolic utterances of an Archbishop. A true-blue Englishman would resist innovation to the death, were it to abolish gout or rid him of the income-tax, just as he would scorn to set out for Heaven by any road not trodden smooth by solid English feet, though it were proved it landed the pilgrim in the wrong place. There are worse things than gout and income-tax, he would tell you; for the first implies hereditary vices, and the second

means the strong hand of Empire with a capital E ; while as to the other, even perdition itself could not be wholly uncongenial if English gentlemen were there. On reaching years of discretion (and occasionally before) your loyal Briton solemnly falls in love, solemnly courts the object of his condescension, solemnly adopts the rôle of martyr by marrying in the family interest, in due time solemnly has his children baptised according to all the cherished rites of the house of Noah. Likewise he solemnly mounts the family hobby-horse and rides unflinchingly till he drops from sheer monotony ; and the wooden steed and the ancient usages descend to kill new generations. In all his doings he is the slave of the past. It would be sacrilege to keep step with the rest of the world or cut the swaddling bands of tradition. Consider, for example, the antique brocaded manners, mammoth gravity, and antediluvian modes of London. I know nothing more depressing except, perhaps, the catacombs of Rome, and there the inhabitants are really dead without any pretence whatever of being alive."

She was herself fortunate in belonging to a people whose life is nearly all future—a people beyond all example lithe, nimble-minded, electric-nerved, original, daring, energetic, successful ; and luckily she brought her home habits with her. That was why, to the gouty mind of a British critic, she turned her splendid mansion in Park Lane into a menagerie with variety shows on the side. In the language of geniality this

means she had a catholic taste, and found the study of diverse human nature at least as entertaining as the ball, the opera, the gaming-table, or the race-course. "Some day, B. B." she told a compatriot, admitted one afternoon to sip tea in her private room, "I'll write a great book out of my experiences, a flaming novel, into which I'll put all the black and gold of humanity. You look out, the truth shall be told for once."

"If you do that," drawled the compatriot, "nobody will believe you. The experience of which you speak ought to have taught you that truth is not what happens to be true, but what happens to be agreeable, what confirms our wishes, tickles our vanity, or supports our prejudices. I infer you don't mean to do that."

"Most certainly and decidedly not, you stupid," was the emphatic answer.

"Then," was the rejoinder, "we shall all read your novel, of course, because the thing won't be written in common ink: all laugh over your delightful exposure of the sins and follies of our neighbours; and all with one accord turn the blind eye to the personal application. If it's flattery you want, go ahead; but if you cherish any ulterior moral designs, you needn't trouble."

"Briscoe Bunting, you're as perverse as ever," she returned angelically. "But we'll have you inside the fold yet. I never knew a cynic who wasn't just a good fellow temporarily out of sorts.

A little disappointment here, a slight cross there—in love, perhaps," she looked at him waggishly; "eyes that are awkwardly keen, a sense of the sham, folly, and fatuity of *some* things and persons, made sweeping and general because of the nasty taste left in the mouth by a chance dose of—shall we say moral and spiritual ipecacuanha? Oh! by all means grin, B. B. But the foundations are all right. The heart's sound, and in due season will send forth its bubbling sentiment like water from the heart of a rock."

"Say," cried B. B., with the easy familiarity of a long cherished friend, "that's a very pretty evangel. Likely to catch on and be popular too, I should say, seeing it's got the imprimatur of Park Lane. If you could only be extricated from the net of fashion and frivolity you'd do good in your day and generation, as sure's a grizzly has claws, you would."

"Thank you very much," she returned in demure mockery; "and you?"

"I—oh! in Villon's immortal phrase, I'm content to watch the angels moulting."

She lifted a jewelled hand in deprecation.

"B. B., you must not be irreverent. Besides, you're only pretending. You never could be a pirate or an atheist or anything of that sort. You haven't the talent to be a real bad man."

"No," he assented with a sigh, "worse luck. I'm cut out to be a martyr."

"Equally impossible, B. B. A martyr's just a pirate gone wrong. Both must do and suffer. You might do; but you couldn't suffer. Now listen. For the time being you pose as a cynic. You affect to believe that every good deed is done from a motive of selfishness—secret or manifest."

He nodded gravely.

"That shows you don't know your own mind. You don't believe any such thing. Don't contradict me please, for I've other things to say. You're over here for pleasure, aren't you? You're in London because you were tired of New York and couldn't endure Boston or Chicago. From London you'll go to Paris, Berlin, possibly to St. Petersburg, unless you turn aside on some vagary by the way. You'll canter through picture galleries without seeing the pictures; you'll hear and tell improper stories in club and hotel smoking-rooms, knowing all the while they're as stale as last year's fashions; you'll yawn at the theatre, and stare at public buildings, wondering why on earth people took the trouble to erect them, because you're bored, horribly and awfully bored."

He nodded again.

"Quite right," he admitted. "I'll be setting out day after to-morrow to do all you say. I told you I was born to be a martyr."

"Oh! you ridiculous, fatuous B. B.," she cried; and then, all of a sudden, "How often have you visited London?"

"Six times," he answered humbly.

"Six times. And you've seen St. Paul's and Westminister Abbey, and the talkee-talkee shops hard by called the Houses of Parliament, and that monument of mediocrity in art, the National Gallery, and the Strand and Piccadilly, perhaps at midnight, you rascal, with the drawing-rooms and dining-rooms of some society hostesses like yours truly, and you imagine you've seen London."

"I rather had that impression certainly."

"Dear, innocent B. B.! And you were content to pass on once again clothed in all your pristine ignorance. Well! you sha'n't then. You'll stay right here and learn. You're in the midst of an ancient civilisation, my friend. London is some days older than New York or Boston. It was done with its teething or ever Chicago got into long clothes. Most of its qualities, virtues and vices alike, are old, ripe, mellow, and a few of them distinguished. Its wisdom dates back very nearly to Solomon; its sins are quaintly mediæval—you'll like them as a change from your own—and its money market, Asaph says, rules the world."

"That's a good deal for Asaph to say, seeing he's from New York," returned Mr. Bunting reflectively. "How long has it taken you to find all that out? Joined a society of antiquaries?"

"Don't be absurd. Could you keep your countenance if you heard I was chums with the Church?"

"My countenance can stand most things by this

time," was the response. "If you told me the Tower of Babel had been imported and set up to keep Cleopatra's Needle company here in London, or the Statue of Liberty in New York, I could swallow it as an item of the day's news without making faces; but you waltzing round with parsons, why, I confess that would astonish almost as much as the catching of Saul among the Prophets."

"You mustn't be nasty, Briscoe Bunting. I'm not waltzing in the wholesale way you imply. There are only two."

"Only two! Good Lord! are you going over to Mormonism?"

"If you're frivolous I'll turn you out. There are two—a dear little Irishman and a fine big Scotsman."

"You had always a taste in contrasts," B. B. commented. "I remember that. Which is the more pleasing sermoniser?"

"They don't preach, you goose, that's their charm. Oh! you needn't arch your eyebrows, it's all O.K.; and for that and divers other reasons, as Scripture saith, you must meet them, B. B. There now, don't tell me the barefaced untruth that your arrangements can't possibly be put off. A man never has arrangements that can't be put off. That's a woman's privilege. So you'll just go right out and wire or telephone that all Continental and other engagements are off—until further notice. There—I knew you would. You're as charming as ever."

The ship which brought the globe-trotting B. B.

brought also certain American financiers, who came, on the suggestion of Savoury and Son, to spy out the land for syndicate or trust purposes. They were to meet Sir Sydney Dormer, Mr. Herstein, and one or two other British capitalists at a quiet dinner in Park Lane. For the sake of variety and some private reasons besides, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy invited her friends at St. Emmanuel and the Scots mission. "It'll just make up the right number for a cosy little dinner," she told her brother, "and I won't bother you with any women, except Rachel and myself. I thought that would make you smile."

The leader in the search for neglected British treasure was Mr. Ephraim Potts, a man of great reputation in the West for sagacity and enterprise; and to Mr. Ephraim Potts the hostess took some pains to be gracious.

"You've come to waken up London, haven't you, Mr. Potts?" she asked sweetly.

Mr. Potts replied that inasmuch as London appeared to be very much in need of wakening up the project could probably be fitted into the general scheme. "And where do you propose to begin, Mr. Potts?" was the next question.

"With the people, of course," came the instant reply. "The wage-earners for me, madam, if you please," added Mr. Potts impressively; "the true repositories of worth, the real producers of wealth, and, therefore, out and away the best source of revenue. As for what's called governing bodies

over here, they're bothered with an inordinate desire to eat and sleep. You find 'em mostly hanging on behind trying to put on the brake."

"I'm so glad you're of that mind, Mr. Potts," said Mrs. Cadwallader Roy radiantly; "for there are two millions of the genuine article right here waiting to be developed. Mr. Emmet can tell you about them."

"Perhaps it would be as well to explain to Mr. Emmet, Potts, that you're not going into any schemes just at present for the benefit of your health," drawled B. B.

Mr. Potts thanked him. Assuredly, they had not crossed the Atlantic for their health, nor were they philanthropists out for a frolic. Mr. Emmet bowed. He knew men did not seek investments from benevolence, and in the light of that knowledge proceeded, at the request of Mr. Potts, to explain how, in his opinion, the two millions might best be exploited, presenting prospects of gain with the zeal of a company promoter, talking £ *s. d.* as if he had no thoughts but of percentages.

This he did because his faith in old methods of bringing happiness to the distressed had lost something of its original force. Happiness must depend on reform, and reform lean on commerce. Philanthropy must pay a minimum of five per cent. Sporadic attempts at regeneration were little better than no attempts at all, and broke the hearts of the workers. Philanthropy pocketing five per cent. was not ideal; but it was unspeakably better than

extortion, taking fifty, a hundred, and even five hundred per cent. Wherefore he dwelt lovingly on the industrial and economic.

"I'll get you to write our prospectuses," Mr. Potts remarked, in high feather; "and you've only to do it half as well as that to make the thing pay." He could give no higher praise.

Of a sudden, however, the tale swerved from the commercial to the social. Mr. Herstein began to feel uncomfortably warm and uncommonly resentful. He bent over his plate, he sat up smiling blankly, he studied the face of the speaker, his claw-like hands itching for vengeance. Once he interrupted in hope of ending the nonsense; but the Irish ass had taken the bit between his teeth, and was neither to be held nor turned aside. The recital brought exclamations of "shame," Rachel, as it appeared, pronouncing the word with particular vehemence. Mr. Herstein, keeping down his natural emotions, had to endure descriptions of places too easily recognised, and methods devised he well knew how. Moreover, there were added epithets and deductions which first made him stone cold and then raging hot.

"Blood-suckers at work on a round million of London's population because there's none to prevent them," Mr. Potts interpreted. Mr. Emmet signified that broadly the fact was so.

A second Mr. Herstein gazed, eyes and brows contracted; then all at once he bent towards Mr. Potts, his face wreathed in livid hate. What

he whispered was meant for one ear alone; but the unwitting note of passion carried it to every ear there. A single word vibrated on the air electrically like the ping of the first bullet in an ambush. The company gave a startled gasp, and held their breath in amazement and awe. In the tense hush Mr. Herstein looked up, consternation in his furtive eyes. Holy Father Abraham! what had he done?

CHAPTER XXVII

MR. HERSTEIN MAKES AMENDS, AND IS AMUSED BY INNOCENCE

THE faces turned on him told he had blundered, and blundered badly. Mr. Emmet flushed dangerously, as a man of honour flushes over a wanton affront. Mr. Dalrymple had the aggressive look of a strong man stung to sudden anger; the others were obviously awaiting developments; and Rachel's expression revealed fear, blended with amazement. To mark was instinctively to plan, and the offender's decision was instant.

History relates that the most masterful and radiant of English Queens "gained more honour and more love by the manner in which she repaired her errors than she would have gained by never committing errors." The rare gift of Elizabeth was Mr. Herstein's also. Of all who stared round the wonder-stricken table none appeared more surprised, more pained, than he. He smiled humbly towards Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, he repeated the smile to Mr. Emmet, he cast a large and benevolent eye on the rest of the company, allowing it to linger

assuringly on Rachel. Then he spoke in honeyed softness. It was perilous to grant ignorance even the liberty of whispering. Ignorance had momentarily betrayed him. This was because—he put it rather as explanation than excuse—it was hard for the ordinary mind, habituated to common things, to accept strange and inhuman tales of doings at their own doors, at once and *in toto*. Part of the information they had heard was astonishing, to say the least. He was quite sure Mr. Potts was astonished; he read profound astonishment in Mr. Bunting's face; Asaph seemed to be straining at a camel; the ladies were shocked, and no wonder. He was shocked himself, and the shock had jerked an unwarrantable expression from his lips. Any ordinary man or woman of the world would have been equally astonished and equally shocked.

Possibly, too, he made the suggestion timidly and under correction; possibly Mr. Emmet's laudable and well-known zeal in the cause of the poor and afflicted gave an unconscious warmth or luridness to the colouring. But that was the merest hint of a possibility. Mr. Emmet had deep and altogether peculiar knowledge of the subject, and he, the apologist, surrendered without a shadow of questioning. He bowed, smiling paternally across the table, and Mr. Emmet could do no less than bow back in amity, albeit the bow was noticeably stiff. Thus discretion makes amends for the momentary failure of tact.

Privily Mr. Herstein told himself it was the game of Gentile priests to over-state evils in order to glorify themselves and magnify their office. What mattered it? One may tolerate adders if their fangs be drawn, and Meckles had declared these particular adders to be quite impotent. As usual Meckles was right. In spite of all that Emmet, Dalrymple, and their kind could say, rents bounded upward and key-money advanced gloriously. The protests of meddlesome, self-constituted reformers were as foam of the sea which the wind catches up and scatters into thin air. One moment they seemed to have reality, and the next, behold they were naught.

He was bending again towards Mr. Potts this time, to whisper of business, when Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, with a woman's untimely frivolity, struck in:

"I suppose, Mr. Emmet, you would inaugurate reform by hanging some of the gentry you have mentioned *pour encourager les autres*, as Voltaire quaintly puts it."

"I'm afraid it's too late," was the response. "The evil seems to be chronic. But I confess there are times when it would be a grim satisfaction to see the engineer hoist on his own petard, or, to put it another way, the cent. per cent. gentlemen going headlong into the pits they have digged for others."

"That would be very nice, wouldn't it?" Mrs. Cadwaller Roy beamed approvingly. "Would it be wicked to say that such a wish does credit to human nature? Well, having got the extortioners in the pit,

what would be your next step? To banish their allies, the publicans?"

"What," cried Asaph, with a satirical laugh, "deprive the British working man of beer? They'd flay you *pour encourager* the other side, if you tried, and don't you forget it. You might conceivably blot out the British Constitution, on an off-chance you might convince land-grabbing politicians that the Sermon on the Mount doesn't exactly authorise you to appropriate your neighbour's possessions if you're able. You might even prove to a Society leader that two new gowns a day are not essential to salvation. But abolish beer, as Chatham said about the conquest of America, Never! Never! Never!"

"Original and impartial observations make me exactly of your mind," remarked B. B. seriously. "The time may come when the British National Debt will be paid off or repudiated. The Bank may disappear; nettles may choke the courts of the Stock Exchange, and owls profane the high places of St. Paul's; nay, an English gentleman at church may even come to give as much thought to the sermon as to the top-hat which he feels is being rubbed the wrong way by somebody's feet. All these things and many others may come to pass, but the loyal Briton will still preserve his thirst; consequently the publican will continue to symbolize the eternal bay tree of Scripture. Yes, sir, when that outrageous New Zealander muses on the desolate arch of London Bridge he will be able to drop round the corner and console himself

with the old-and-bitter which wags have yclept *mother-in-law*. If the very last 'Last Man' should chance to be British in the final crisis of things the recording angel will certainly catch him coming out of a pub wiping his mouth after what a sociable divine has called an honest Christian dram."

"Judging by share quotations and brewers' fortunes, I guess the publican's a pretty hardy sort of a plant over here," observed Mr. Potts.

"Individually, I believe he's rather short-lived," Asaph returned. "Collectively, he's as nearly immortal as anything that's purely human and mundane can be. Most of our fleeting concerns will precede the publican into the darkness of extinction and oblivion. Yes, sir, the very last British institution to go will be the ruby-hued, over-blown gentleman who supplies the nation with liquor. What I should feel about it if I were in your shoes, Mr. Emmet, is this, that there's mighty little hope of getting proletarian England to take the road to heaven unless it's assured there's a good supply of bars by the way and ceaseless spigots at the end. Paradise would not be paradise without beer."

The general company laughed, but Mr. Emmet hung his head.

"Truth spoken in jest, Mr. Savoury, is sometimes the bitterest truth of all," he said presently, looking up.

"Bitterer than aloes," put in Mr. Dalrymple in quick confirmation. "You have expressed a thought,

sir, which we in the East End have been afraid to whisper even to ourselves.

Mr. Emmet nodded sadly.

"Yes, absolutely, perhaps cowardly afraid," pursued Mr. Dalrymple, his eyes beginning to shine. "It's idle to disguise the fact that with millions of the people the sons of Belial are too hard for us. I am thinking of two in particular," he explained in answer to a question from the hostess. "The publican and his demonic younger brother, the property sweater, the slum lord, who has all but extinguished family life on his estates, who is fast making decency impossible within his borders, and rushing up the premium on crime."

"Oh! the monster," cried Mrs. Cadwallader Roy and Rachel in a breath.

"How does he do it?" B. B. inquired. He was interested in masters of any art or craft, even though the art were the art of extortion, and the craft the craft of cruelty. "I've heard of him in New York, and I understand he's made his appearance in Chicago and other western cities. But he's mostly a feeder on older civilisations. How does he manage his business?"

"In a company like this I dare not tell you," was the answer. "But I may state as a simple palpable fact, that wherever he spreads his tentacles, the rent and the death-rate go up together, while all things that respectable people value go down headlong. He treads to wealth on bleeding hearts and maimed lives,

wrecked manhood and womanhood, crushed infancy and broken old age. Another fact signifying and illustrating a great deal is this, that on the average two-thirds of the earnings of every working family in the East End go to the publican and the property sweater."

There were more exclamations of "shame"; but while the other faces expressed anger or loathing, a glimmering amusement flickered on the countenance of Mr. Herstein. Bless their simplicity! If he were so minded he could tell them much more wonderful things. A third of the average earnings to the landlord! What would they say to half-a-sovereign and twelve-and-six in the pound? Would they be amazed and horrified to hear of twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five shillings in the pound? How the mention of forty shillings would make them gape and ejaculate! What would they think of three pounds sterling for fifteen shillings' worth of accommodation? Had they ever heard of an art which multiplies an original shilling of key-money by five, by ten, then by twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, a hundred, and finally the hundred by ten? The simpletons! Mr. Herstein could scarcely conceal his scorn.

"I'm dreadfully interested in all this," Mrs. Cadwallader Roy remarked, smiling comprehensively on her two clergymen. "I really think, Rachel dear, you and I must explore. I've tasted and want more, *à la* the hackneyed Oliver. Will you take charge of us, Mr. Emmet, allowing us to go with you just

where you'd go yourself? Last time, you remember, we had to retreat. I should like to catch some of your strange flock in deshabille."

"Defy you to catch them in anything else," her brother laughed. "The old Adam goes about in undress uniform round St. Emmanuel. Scrape and you come on original sin in no time. Don't you, Mr. Emmet? And I understand the genuine old Adam is most himself when he's of the feminine gender. Then he goes it head-down and without compunction."

A purposeful look came into Mrs. Cadwallader Roy's face.

"Rachel dear," she said, turning to Miss Herstein, "isn't the honour of our sex a little bit at stake! We must carry out our expedition, and we cannot go alone."

"Not likely," assented Asaph, likewise glancing at Rachel.

"Then," said Mrs. Cadwallader Roy radiantly, as if she had but to speak to have the matter settled, "Mr. Emmet and Mr. Dalrymple will take us in hand."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A WOMAN'S WAY AND OTHERS

BUT Mr. Emmet shook his head.

"You wouldn't like it," he answered, his voice thrilling curiously. "Believe me, you wouldn't."

"Try us," returned Asaph, with the crispness of his nation.

"Might as well," added Mr. Potts, mentally figuring out possibilities.

"And meanwhile, as we can't start out right away," put in Mr. Briscoe Bunting, "tell us some more. We need a sketch-map and geographical information of this new land."

To Dives, with his elegant legs under the mahogany and his heart and imagination fervent with wine, the congeries of Whitechapel and Spitalfields took on the glamour of Moorish bazaars, became a picturesque medley of aboriginal human nature, unclean by all accounts, assuredly immoral, but interesting precisely because of its aberrations and its deflections from tedious convention. The adventure promised new and Briscoe Bunting's vocation in life was to capture

new sensations. As the task grew daily more difficult, he was the warmer in encouragement of Mr. Emmet.

Mr. Herstein, though his reasons for intervention seemed urgent, looked on with a placid, almost a seraphic, look of acquiescence. He was himself again, more fully and alertly himself in truth, because of the little indiscretion, now happily blotted out and forgotten. Not for nothing had he centuries of stern discipline behind him.

"A little sermon, sir," he said, bowing affably across the table.

Mr. Emmet seemed to hitch up as for action.

"I didn't expect to be called on professionally," he responded. "If there's to be a sermon there must be a text as well."

"Surely," assented Mr. Herstein with feline softness. "There must be a text."

"Then," rejoined Mr. Emmet with unexpected vigour, "I am fortunate in finding one to my hand in the writings of a latter-day prophet." He was on the point of adding "and one of your own people," but refrained. "It has the advantage," he went on, "of being as absolutely up-to-date as an American patent, as nicely adjusted to current needs as the latest Paris fashion."

"Will it go with a glass of wine?" cried B. B. "I warn you I won't have my digestion spoiled."

"Warranted to go with anything," replied Mr. Emmet, smiling with unwonted grimness.

"A new creed perhaps?" suggested Mrs. Cadwallader Roy.

"You shall judge for yourself," returned Mr. Emmet. "Here it is:

"'*A new table, oh! my brethren, I put over you. Become hard. No more weak parleying about the rights of man, those empty formulas of a religion of which we have given up the substance. We are in possession; we are the superiors; we are the strongest. The best things belong to me and mine, and if men give us nothing we take them—the best food, the purest sky, the strongest thoughts, the fairest women.*'"

"I say," cried B. B., "that's going it strong, isn't it? And I'm not at all sure of the soundness of the views. Shouldn't expect, for example, to meet the fairest women in Slumdom, though I do declare the prettiest girl I ever set eyes on—but that's rot," he ended abruptly, turning with an air of apology to the hostess.

"Go on, Mr. Bunting," she smiled back. "We can stand the truth, thanks."

"Oh! all I meant to say was," B. B. explained, "that long, long ago I used to think the prettiest girl I ever set eyes on was a little Italian chit down Castle Garden way, in New York."

"But you've got over the infatuation and taken to travel. We mustn't interrupt, however. Go on, please, Mr. Emmet, and will you remember that we Americans have a weakness for the concrete and

the actual. I used to wonder whether Mrs. Browning's 'Cry of the Children' was merely a poetic cry, artistically worked up for effect, or came straight from the quivering heart."

"I think," was the reply, "it came straight from the quivering heart. All the same, if she were alive to-day she would translate the cry without any thought of poetry."

"What makes you say that?" B. B. asked blandly.

"Many things," Mr. Emmet answered. "Among them this one fact: that when I've seen dead children lying uncoffined on shelves in the one room that made home, and heard their little brothers and sisters wailing for bread, the wail has seemed to me too bitter for poetry. If there weren't so many things in the government of this world which our groping minds cannot understand, I should wonder why God condemns innocent children to the existence of a London slum."

"Publicans have been mentioned this evening," said Sir Sydney Dormer. "Isn't the distress of the children mainly due to the drinking of the parents? So far as I can make out, these are not precisely noted for sobriety and good conduct."

Mr. Herstein gave his fellow-director a look of gratitude and approval. The remark was in the interest of truth.

"No, God help them, they're sinners like the rest of us," Mr. Emmet owned. "But let us not forget that multitudes of them take to drink as a drug

for misery, being driven into the arms of the publican by his colleague, the slum lord. Let me give a recent instance, because in these matters one concrete case is worth tons of abstract reasoning. A poor fellow who strove to do his duty as I have never had the strength or courage to strive in mine, one evening received notice that he must pay three shillings per week more for his mouldy, blistered room or go. Already his rent had been thrice raised within a few months, and existence was a struggle for a roof and bare bread. For the hundredth time he went out in search of a cheaper place, because he could not pay the three shillings more and have anything for his children to eat. Imagine his feelings when I tell you he left his wife sewing a coarse shroud for their first-born, who lay, a shrunk mite, uncoffined on the table beside her, as winsome a boy as ever gladdened the heart of mother, though a slum waif. From a bed of straw and sacking a little girl gazed upward with the wide, wistful eyes that seemed to look far beyond things present. The woman who made the shroud cut her cloth in two, and turned away that the watching child should not see her face. The work with needle and thread interested the little thing, and she asked what her mother was doing. 'Making a dress for you, dear.' From the pallet of straw and sacking came a feeble cry of gladness. 'Oh! and it'll be white, mummy.' Within a week she was wearing her white dress."

A sough of pity and horror came from the men;

the eyes of Mrs. Cadwallader Roy and Rachel gleamed with unconscious tears.

"After a while," continued Mr. Emmet, "the father returned from a fruitless search, looked round a minute, and went out again, determined that if in all the city of six millions there was a hole to creep into for which he could pay he would find it. In all the city it seemed there was no hole, cavern, or cave for him. At last, shoeless and heartless, he turned once more towards home, if the word be not too satirical. He passed many public-houses, dazed in his weakness and pain. Presently, in front of a flaming palace, he met an old chum, a mate in the days gone by, who took his arm and led him within. His head was light, and he drank."

"Just so," observed Mr. Herstein. "You see he could drink."

The tone implied that such as drink should suffer, and had no cause to complain of misfortune brought about by their own incontinence and bad habits.

"How easy virtue seems when there's no temptation," said Mr. Emmet. "What strange things the best of us at times do in distress. But he didn't drink much, Mr. Herstein. Presently he left the public-house and went home, to find that his room had almost been cleared for the rent. I needn't try to describe the thoughts of husband and wife as they looked at each other and at their children. In the madness of despair the father went out again and again drank. That is one of our English

methods of making drunkards. In that case we succeeded in making a criminal as well. For some hours later the frenzied man took the law into his own hands, and to-night he is in one of our convict prisons. Yet I tell you I never knew a more honest, more upright, or a better-hearted man. At whose door lies the responsibility for his fall? Do you think God will not enter into judgment with us for such things?"

"The man himself was to blame, was he not?" remarked Mr. Herstein, as if to indicate, "Depend upon it you're quite mistaken about the judgments of Heaven."

"So Jezebel reasoned regarding Naboth when it was desirable to have his vineyard," was the retort.

"Oh! Mr. Emmet, you frighten us," put in Mrs. Cadwallader Roy.

"I apologise," returned Mr. Emmet promptly. "Shall I stop?"

"Oh! dear, no. Personally, I'll just sit tight on my chair. I love to be thrilled. It's like being a child over again and feeling your flesh creep with ghost stories. Do you mind, dear?" turning to Rachel. As Rachel, too, loved to be a child once more, and she was backed by Asaph and Mr. Briscoe Bunting, the story-teller proceeded. "With your permission, then, I'll give another instance from recent experience. You know the court called Beulah Place, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy?"

"A dreadful spot," she replied quickly. "You can have no idea what it's like, Rachel."

"Very well, in Beulah Place a man failed because the oppressor was too much for him—one of many similar failures. He came from the country in great hope, bringing a wife and children. Hope went first, and then all other things followed. It is hard to live when you've nothing to eat, so one Saturday night when the collector called for his rent there was a corpse newly cut down from a staple in the wall."

"Did he sicken and remit the rent?" Asaph asked.

"He knew his business better than that. Stepping over the corpse, he took the furniture."

Despite the general murmur of indignation Mr. Herstein bore up magnificently.

"Don't you think it cowardly to—to get rid of a debt like that?" he asked softly.

"As a student, sir," responded Mr. Emmet, "I was taught that suicide is a crime against the sacredness of life. And there remains a high canon against self-slaughter. Yet the wisest of us is human; and if Socrates drank hemlock to hasten the end of misfortune, has not an English serf some excuse for declining to die by slow torture in a London slum? As to the charge of cowardice, one would like to see how some of the betrumpeted heroes who walk the earth as archangels and demigods would comport themselves for twelve months where my poor friend gave up the enterprise of trying to live.

For myself, I declare that in real courage and endurance I know no people fit to stand beside the inhabitants of our slums."

"Really!" cried Asaph.

"Yes, sir, every day of my life I am amazed and shamed by their patience, inspired by their heroism, cheered by their good humour. But because they are a little imprudent and greatly unfortunate, because they do not seem to us worth saving, we leave them to the wolves and tigers. But the ravening will not go on for ever. One day they will get a leader. One day a real man of the people will arise, and then they will save themselves, and the *Dies Irae* will be chanted to new meanings. They are dumb, blind, and helpless now, but one day they will speak, see, and act."

"And then Heaven help the wolves and tigers, eh?" said Briscoe Bunting.

"Oh, let us hope not," cried Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, with an eerie shudder. "Let us sincerely hope not. It seems almost a crime to be enjoying all this," sweeping the luxurious room with her eyes, "after all you've told us, Mr. Emmet. Do you know what you make me think of? It's that passage in our favourite Heine, Rachel dear, in which he describes how that pale figure, with the drops of blood on its brow and the crown of thorns on its head, and the great cross on its shoulders, enters upon the feast of the gods and throws the cross on the high table, so that everything on it, including

the massive goblets of gold, totters frightfully, and the gods themselves melt into vapour as in awe of that judgment. Fancy the reeling there would be if the same pale figure entered now."

"I'm very sorry," Mr. Emmet began apologetically; but Mrs. Cadwallader Roy interrupted, "Please don't be sorry; these things do us an immense amount of good, don't they, Mr. Potts?"

"S'pose so," returned Mr. Potts, with a dubious twist of the countenance.

"Oh, yes, they do, and," smiling graciously towards Mr. Emmet, "they help to remove obstacles and overcome doubts."

She rose, glancing at Rachel, but in passing out she remarked to Mr. Emmet, "Thank you very much for answering all your own objections. We'll be ready any time—and the sooner the better."

CHAPTER XXIX

COMRADES IN ARMS

THE spell of the East, the iniquitous, maleficent, parti-coloured, fascinating East, was upon Mr. Emmet, and on the morning of the great day drew him forth shivering. On the evening before, Dr. Jopling, a bosom friend and fellow spirit of the slums, said certain things in the autocratic manner of science to which he would fain have turned an unbelieving ear.

"Don't you see you're killing yourself?" the doctor demanded impatiently; "and whether you believe it or not, the fact is as old as the race, that dead men render no service."

"Pardon me, Jopling, but it's not true," was the response, made with the weary smile which sooner or later comes to the face of every slum-worker. "Suppose I cross the black bridge, is that the end? You know better, my dear Jopling, for you're not only the best of physicians, but the soundest of Christians, the most irrepressible of idealists."

"None of your blarney," was the retort. "You'd charm the snakes out of Ireland if St. Patrick hadn't

done the thing already. God forbid I should make light of ideals. Bless my heart! haven't they and you, between you, brought me here and kept me here, making me endure a temporary hell in hope of a permanant heaven? In your charming way you call that selfishness. Never mind. We are constituted to go by the law of compensation. It's *quid pro quo*, my friend, however you take it. Only don't you flatter yourself that you're ready for the martyr's crown just yet. If you saw me flogging a jaded horse you'd call me cruel. Men may pity horses and practise cruelty on themselves. You need a holiday. Where would you like to go?"

"But that's impossible, Jopling," Mr. Emmet protested warmly; "absolutely impossible."

"Quite so," was the rejoinder. "Let me feel your pulse."

Though Mr. Emmet had a heart far above panic, the instinct of all the children of Adam made him watch the physician's face intently; and he read the verdict before it was spoken.

"Pretty fluttery, isn't it?" he said quietly. "I can see you're to have a job in keeping the machine going, but I rely on you to do it. Really, Jopling, I cannot afford to fall ill."

"No, I suppose not," responded the doctor slowly as he pocketed his watch. "In all my experience I never knew a man of any importance who could—not one. Yet men are constantly doing the thing they cannot possibly afford. Let me tell you some-

thing. Two Sundays ago I turned into a certain church for refreshment and healing, and the spiritual physician who prescribed for the sick people looking up to him was dreadfully in earnest about one thing. With a quivering emotion he warned us of the frightful danger of neglect. I can see him this minute leaning over his pulpit pleading with us to look to ourselves; and he used these words, which remained with one at least of those who listened: 'God is loving and merciful, longsuffering, and wondrously slow to wrath. Only in the last resort will He smite. But make no mistake, He will not be mocked. The result of mockery is unspeakably terrible. You have no time for religion; every thought, every faculty is engrossed in the material problem of living. Believe me, you shall one day cease to be so engrossed, and in spite of the most pressing duties, and the most clamorous distractions, you will find time to die.' The lesson seemed to me apt and admirable. With all reverence I adopt the words and apply the moral. So I say Nature is loving and merciful, longsuffering and wondrously slow to wrath. Only in the last resort will she smite; but make no mistake she will not be mocked. The result of mockery is unspeakably terrible. Need I adduce any other argument in favour of a holiday?"

Mr. Emmet smiled sadly over the use thus made of his own warning.

"Thank you," he returned, with the charm of manner which was equally potent in disarming and

inspiring. "I recognise Nature as the handmaid of her Maker, obeying his behests and fulfilling His purposes in ways which we are only dimly beginning to understand. She neither lies nor deviates."

"Good," cried Dr. Jopling blithely, "we are progressing. When we learn to give an open ear to the voice of nature I cannot help thinking we're on the high road to wisdom. And by that same token of the open ear you need a rest, got to take it, or your blood be upon your own head."

Mr. Emmet looked at his friend with a queer half-fearful, half-resentful expression.

"You're trying to frighten me, Jopling," he said.

"Wish it were possible," was the prompt retort. "Some men are a great deal too difficult to frighten. But if I'm not right now, then Nature, whose other name is science, whose other name is truth, does not speak by me. I have been watching you lately. You have been going at a tremendous pace, and if you didn't see the danger signals I did. Yes, my dear Emmet, you positively must clear out of this, and take a rest."

"My God!" cried Mr. Emmet, touched at last. "How can I? How can I?"

In a breathless rush he gave unanswerable reasons for clinging at all hazards to his post—at any rate for the present. Could Jopling not see what was at stake? The apathy of Dives in all that concerned

Lazarus was the cause of paralysing, heart-sickening disappointment. Could he go just when rich friends were becoming sympathetic? No, no, such a chance must not be lost. It would be cowardice to run away—nay worse, it would be treason to God and man. Plutocratic England was evidently hopeless; yet Providence seemed to be raising up helpers. How could he go in the moment of an experiment they might never be able to repeat? Opportunities were few, time was shortening, possibility abridging terribly. Moreover, he had under his personal care this case of sickness, and that other of destitution or homelessness; here one was going to hospital, there another coming out penniless, and yonder again yet another about to be thrown, with wife and children, into the street by the bully of the rack-renter. Misery, manifold and unutterable, cried to him to stay, clutched at his heart-strings, and would not let him go. A little later, when some urgent cases were relieved, a few tangled matters unravelled, but not yet—not yet.

Dr. Jopling gazed in pity at the lone, lorn little man, abandoned to struggle as he might or could in the immitigable chaos of suffering and atrocity. A fierce anger stirred his pulses, but for Mr. Emmet's sake it was with an assumption of jocularity he said: "Well, if ever I'm privileged to get His Grace of Canterbury, or other prelate and Right Reverend Father in God by the ear, I'll whisper some wholesome neglected truths regarding this forsaken land of

bitterness. And I should count it my duty to do the same by any Right Reverend Moderator, President, Councillor, Mayor, Almighty Beadle, or Minister of State whom chance put in my way. Meanwhile there's our friend of the Noncon. mission—as good a fellow as I know."

"A splendid fellow," put in Mr. Emmet ardently.

"Despite his Nonconformity," laughed Dr. Jopling.

"Perhaps a little because of it," was the quick rejoinder. "There now," as the other lifted his eyebrows, "don't go and wilfully misunderstand me. When Dalrymple and I meet it's not to discuss Apostolic succession, nor liveries, nor shoulder straps, nor the colour of facings. He does not go to Lambeth for his authority, and I don't go to Calvin's Institutes for mine. What of that? Humanity is above Church polity. There remains our brother to be helped, our sister to be lifted from the mire and set on her feet. None owns that with a heartier goodwill, I might say a fiercer ardour, than Drummond Dalrymple. At the start he came to me with a breeziness that was as a whiff of heather and clover, and said to me in effect: 'I have come to work with you. Teach me.' Wasn't it nice of him? For the rest, we remember that to those whom we wish to aid one church is as another; that what they want is not creed or dogma, but a human soul to speak to them, to hold out the right hand of fellowship. That's our ground; and I tell you, Jopling, that if it's true (and one may as well doubt the fatherhood of God)

that he who helps his fellow-men is Christ's own brother, then you and I will do well to keep close to Dalrymple. Yes, Dalrymple's a splendid fellow, but his hands are just as full as mine."

"Yes, often literally full," assented Dr. Jopling, "and a little reckless. What do you think I caught him doing the other day? Blowing flowers of sulphur into a throat just closing with diphtheria; an old remedy of his mother's, he told me; cured the patient, too, by Jove. Another time I found him holding a bedridden old woman in his arms while her little granddaughter made the bed with a pair of clean sheets and a blanket he had just brought. It was into the same place I saw him carrying half a cwt. of coal, for all the world as if he were smuggling a packet of sweets for children."

"That's Dalrymple," cried Mr. Emmet.

"And what do you say to this? Two days ago I came on a street fight. Of course I was discreetly passing by on the other side, like our old friend the priest, when all at once a shout went up, and turning I saw Dalrymple in the thick of the crowd. That fight stopped suddenly. 'Going to give me in charge?' asked one of the offenders, after a vain attempt to break from the vice-like grip. 'Give you in charge,' was the reply. 'No, you donkey, but I've more than half a mind to help your mother in giving you what you deserve. Tut, tut; think shame of yourself, going on like this in the open street. You just stop your foolishness and come along with me.'

And do you know that fellow went off as meekly as if he had never sinfully doubled a fist. In the circumstances an ordinary man would have been knocked senseless, and the fray would have gone on merrily over his fallen body."

"Dalrymple's not an ordinary man," said Mr. Emmet.

"No," rejoined Dr. Jopling. "Like some one else I could name, he's a bit of an enchanter. Well, I must be off. My man will bring you a pleasant little pick-me-up in the course of half-an-hour or so. After that it won't take you long to pack your travelling bag."

Mr. Emmet, however, was not to be deterred from making his venture; but the doctor took care that when the explorers set forth, after a modest luncheon at St. Emmanuel Vicarage, Mr. Dalrymple was of the party. Mr. Briscoe Bunting, sniffing the air like a sportsman, remarked jauntily it was as if time were turning the grim fiction of the Florentine to reality, only the immortals were wanting, and he feared there would be no Paradise or Beatrice to crown the end.

"On the whole," he added, "it's perhaps just as well the ladies weren't able to come after all."

The guides nodded assent, wondering within themselves how much even the untried masculine nerve could endure. They were careful to dip gradually, lest too sudden or too pungent a whiff of the pit's reek should discourage at the start.

CHAPTER XXX

THE CITY OF DIS

THE upper region, in Dantean phrase the first circle, was enveloped in a darkness thick, indeed, and cold in contrast with the world of variegated light and brilliancy to which the strangers were accustomed, but a garden of sunshine compared with the blackness of Dis lower down; and not lacking in those elements of the quaint or picturesque which fashion, on some mysterious authority, accounts an antidote for all the aches and ills of age, sickness, cold, hunger, and penury. In this outer limbus about the fatal gates struggled the recent arrivals. Many of them had been attracted from afar by the fabled gold of the capital city of Christendom, and were awaking as from horrors of a nightmare to direr horrors of reality.

Most of these retained some smack or vestige of the fairer, happier regions they had left—a wistful modesty, a pathetic wish to hide the signs of distress, an alien art of neatness showing itself touchingly in deft patches and threadbare cleanliness. Clothes were washed and mended at dead of night by weary

hands, so that children might at least appear respectable in school. Even stairs and floors were scrubbed in a fight with the smothering demon of dirt. To the untutored or the careless observer it might still appear as respectability eking out a slender wage in passing misfortune. Alas! the misfortune was chronic; because in the victims' pockets other men's hands were secretly helping themselves, secretly draining resources. Many things go hand in hand with the poverty which hangs over the abyss. A calamity in itself, it is yet more frightful as the mother of calamities, unimagined, perhaps unimaginable, by the prosperous. Here the dark brood begins to close about its prey; for here begins the slippery descent on which neither man nor woman can set foot and hold up. Here decency makes its last pitiable stand, turns for a moment at bay before being forced irrevocably downward. It is here that parents clutch their children in the attempt to hold back, were it only an instant, from the black edge that half conceals half reveals the gulf below. It is here that the husband turns and looks at his wife, asking himself whether it would not be kinder to strike in love than suffer her to go over the horrible brink; and the wife regarding her husband and little ones thinks it would be best for them all to die together, Roman fashion, rather than prolong the agony to lose their souls in the end. It is here that the boy meant to be a nation's pride and strength welters into crime, and the girl meant for a good man's heart

and home takes the last dread step towards the unspeakable. Suicide is rife, and would be yet rifer but for the instinct which clings even to wretchedness if life be thereby preserved.

In the lower circles the descent is frightfully accelerated; for the pressure above increases, and beneath there is the suction of a bottomless bog drawing insatiably. Hope dies, misery goads, the seared feelings harden; as with the rebel angels evil is taken for good, primal instincts flame forth in savage atavism, hideously satirising a boasted civilisation. The hunted and harried turn on the hunters and harriers in tigerish revenge, with results that put Christianity to shame. In great schools and confederacies of crime desperate men and women, leagued in felony by common wrongs and common needs, live as lives the wolf, only with a deadlier resource, a finer talent for anarchy, developed by their greater necessities. Yesterday Paris held the blue-ribbon for organised wickedness, to-day it is London's; to-morrow it may be New York's, for it is an accompaniment of progress and pleasure, and flutters, an ominous symbol, at the posterns of wealth.

What comes of the study and practice of predatory revenge by social banditti, scientifically trained and spurred by the first law of nature, is partially described in records which amiable, self-respecting people eschew as a pollution. In ampler detail it is known to the police and the slum-workers, the heroic missionaries who die for the home-made savage

without eulogy, without picturesque biography—generally without reward save such as the world can neither give nor withhold. But the inner activities, the great processes of inception and execution, are known to the elect alone.

A little of the outer ring the explorers were permitted to see, and of that little Mr. Briscoe Bunting threw off some lightning impressions for a correspondent in New York. Since it is salutary to see ourselves as others see us, an appropriate passage may be quoted. Mr. Bunting's condensed observations ran thus:—

Children—shocking examples of neglect, unfed, mostly unwashed, and often clothed only to the extent of having their nakedness hidden. Early death the rule, maiming and deformity far from being the exception. Women— well, you must come here to understand how far a woman can descend, how completely she can shed all relics and traces of decency whether in behaviour or appearance. The exceptions acutely miserable and tragic to behold. Men—the oddest medley of loafers, ex-convicts, decayed gentlemen, habitual drunkards, professional thieves, casual labourers, and honest workers; couldn't imagine the incongruous mixture without seeing it. Atmosphere dense with grime, smoke, misery, and crime.

By way of variety old lady with Irish brogue, a bed-ridden daughter, and a son doing penal servitude "because he was led away by thim about him, pore

bhoy," volunteered to dance a jig in the street in defiance of traffic for the price "av a toothful of the crathur," and might "all the sints in Heaven" bless the good, kind gentlemen. Essayed to keep her word and went down; essayed again and repeated the drop. In the end was led off by a young Samson of her own people, wheedling and protesting weirdly.

Two damsels in a ring just finishing a duel—the cause of battle a coster-Apollo in immense rows of buttons and an oily bang standing by placidly awaiting results. Both hair and blood drawn freely; no interference from police; evidently common occurrence.

Procession of frowsy mothers, with a straggling tail of children, to pawn-shop; enlarged procession a little later to gin palace. Presently another reeling back. Our guide, a stalwart and militant man of the Gospel, indiscreetly remonstrated, knowing some of the revellers. Party retorted with some trenchant criticism of our personal looks, and desired the pleasure of fighting us—then and there. Being obliged to decline were followed by a swarm of small boys inquiring if our mothers knew we were out? May surprise you, but the gamin of New York has something to learn from the gamin of London. Latter has ages of tradition and transmitted iniquity behind him. He's the most pertinent object lesson in heredity on the face of the earth to-day.

Had several noted burglars pointed out; two had done time, as the saying is here, for unreasonable violence in the taking of goods; a third actually

aided the police in a little affair in which he was himself principal. All were known to be busy in their profession, despite the vigilance of Scotland Yard. Saw, also, a broken-down preacher, an ex-University tutor, an ex-army officer, and a lady who once owned her carriage in Mayfair, staggering in rags from a low tavern. Peeped into many public-houses; nearly all full; crowds of the drinkers spending their last coppers, and looking as if they had never eaten, or slept, or washed.

Internal items. Five cases of little children left alone in rooms starving. Nearly broke our necks descending in darkness from two of them. Small girl of six with broken arm on bag of rotten straw. Dad came in one night in liquor and "did it," she said. Tone void of complaint; seemed to take it as one of dad's rights and privileges. At least a good half-dozen women we called on decorated with black eyes in token of masculine ascendency—European style. Mode of living inconceivable. A room in which you could hardly swing a cat contained family of seven—six living and one, aged three, dead. Corpse lay on table beside mother and elder children, who plucked fur. Air a choking smother of down. Wonder how they breathed. Whole, including corpse, to be turned out next day at noon for non-payment of rent. Similar cases by the score. This packing as of hogs in pens the rule throughout East London. Be good enough to imagine for yourself the scents and sanitation.

In little more than an hour discovered four neglected cases of final stage of consumption, due, I was told, to over-crowding—three children and a widow. Latter had two boys depending on her. Broke down when we spoke to her, and pleaded with Mr. Dalrymple, the militant man of peace aforesaid, to take charge of her boys when she was gone. Oh! my dear, what eloquence was in that poor mother's tongue. I couldn't stand it; even Potts was in tears—furtively, of course. It doesn't do for a leader of finance to blubber openly. Only food in room a morsel that Mr. Dalrymple had brought. He found, he told us afterwards, a bare mutton bone which the two boys gnawed by turns, half a cupful of dripping, and a pitcher of cold water. Think of it, you who feast! Under notice from landlord to go. If East London landlords dissected one might expect to find them with chunks of nether-millstone for hearts. Let me give you the widow's case in fuller detail since it appears to be typical.

"That'll finish me, sir," she said, referring to the eviction. "But what of them?" glancing towards her two helpless boys. And then vehemently, before we could say a word, "Oh! good God, why do You allow this?" I think we had all something in our throats as she went on addressing Mr. Dalrymple, "You have been very, very kind to me, sir, since my man was taken by the fever, Mr. Emmet and you. You have told me how to be good and trust in our Father in Heaven, and

I've tried. Oh! I've tried so hard—but, but I think, sir, He can't love me as you say, or I shouldn't be like this—and Him able to do anything." Mr. Dalrymple soothed her, and, gasping for breath, she looked up. "Do you think, sir, I shall go to the good place?" "Don't doubt that," Mr. Dalrymple answered. "And my boys, sir, my boys," she panted, "shall I meet them there at last?" and as Mr. Dalrymple, being unable to speak, nodded, "I was afraid we were all too poor and ignorant and bad. But I believe you, sir. I do. And when I get there, if they let me, depend upon it, I'll go straight to God and tell Him how poor people are done by here, 'cept by His messengers—and—and p'raps He'll do something." Dalrymple stayed behind a minute when the rest of us went—and what do you think he was doing? Making the bed and tidying up for that poor woman. "It's a case Mr. Emmet handed over to me," he said, "and were it only for his sake the trust is precious." This Mr. Emmet, also a clergymen, started out with us, but was soon obliged to return—ill himself—and delivered us into the hands of his friend and ally.

Came on two cases of private and one case of public eviction. In the private instance the rent ogre (our friend Meckles to wit) left paralysed old woman of seventy helpless on stairs; husband died only a week before. "Starvation," said the coroner's jury. Skilled mechanic perished because of greed and bad government; and multitudes go like him.

Public eviction—that is eviction by public body roused to a spurt of duty ; most extraordinary sight I ever saw. Fancy a whole block of buildings with fronts—doors, windows, and walls—knocked out, and occupants threatening or crouching like wild beasts within, exposed to wind and weather. "Why don't they quit?" I asked. "Because," was the answer, "they have no other place in all the wide earth to go to." Seems this was the second turning out of the same lot. First time, on finding themselves in the street, they broke open the doors and forced their way back. Now the houses are literally coming down about their ears, and the desperate cling, because up to a certain point a falling house is better than no house at all.

Outside a crowd of despairing people—mostly women and children—wept, or wrung their hands, or sat stolidly in the apathy which comes of the worst, the very worst, among heaps of tumbled furniture—starving from house-famine. In these slums the people swarm like ants. Nearly 3,000 to the acre in one spot, it is said, 1,500 in another, and in several spots 1,000. Naturally the congestion results in the most horrible blotches and gangrene. Courts and alleys simply reek with infection and death. And all this in the heart of Christian England —dear old mother England, as we've heard her called. All I've got to say is that it's time for dear old mother England to look to herself. She can't possibly fester like this and live. Appears to me that

even now he'll be a clever physician who'll cure her.

Thus Mr. Briscoe Bunting, social physiologist and capitalist of pleasure. He speaks, it will be noted, with the largeness of his nation, its rapidity, its genius for getting home. There was no dust in B. B.'s eyes, nor any suspicion of staleness in heart or brain, despite his misfortune in being born sole heir to millions and an income which all his ingenuity could not spend. His impressions are given trippingly in shorthand; in gathering them he was as a huntsman with the view halloo. The pace, as he has indicated, was too much for Mr. Emmet, who had to turn aside to the Scots mission like a soldier forced to fall out on the march. There, by good luck, Miry found him and helped him home, since he positively refused to be put into a cab. They went arm in arm, the Church leaning gratefully on the strength of the weak sister.

"He'll die before his time if he's not careful," observed Mr. Bunting, watching the retreat of the shivering figure. "And you, sir," turning to Mr. Dalrymple, "how long do you reckon to hold out?"

"As long as God gives me strength," was the answer.

"Just so. Meanwhile the ancient enemy's got his hand in pretty deep. Used to think New York was bad enough, and Chicago's been called hot names, but they're outskirts of Paradise to this. What did you say is the population of your metropolitan Inferno here?"

"A million or so," replied Mr. Dalrymple. "If you're at all particalar as to conditions, a million and a half."

"Holy Jericho," cried B. B. "Potts, think of it. After 5,000 years of civilisation, more or less, and nineteen full centuries of Christianity, a million people in one British city living, partly by choice but mostly by compulsion, below the level of the Red Indian and the Hottentot. Appears to be something wrong somewhere, doesn't there? There's the dome of your national cathedral, sir." He waved his hand towards St. Paul's looming massively in the evening smoke. "Last Sunday I heard one of your bishops preach a sermon there on National Greatness, and I gathered that Providence reserves the fertilising rain and dew and the cream of good things generally for the British Empire, and especially for its capital city. Talked a lot of an Imperial race; is this where it's reared? Seems to me that if he had cared to listen he might have heard the sudden murmur of hell."

As it would not be seemly in Mr. Dalrymple to express his mind concerning dignitaries who talk fustian, the party moved on through noisome court and alley. They took Beulah Place on their way, and at dusk reached Vernal Avenue. There Mr. Dalrymple drew up.

"Aren't we going in here?" B. B. inquired.

"I think we'd better not," replied Mr. Dalrymple.

Potts and B. B. together demanded the reason.

"Because," was the significant answer, "I want neither an inquest nor a funeral. Come."

But they had already ventured too far, and as he spoke they were surrounded.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE SMARTNESS OF VERNAL AVENUE

AS miraculously as gather the vultures out of the inane at the chance of prey, a group of Vernal Avenue spirits materialised from out the invisible, and immediately evinced a playful disposition to jostle the visitors. At a move to evade these pleasantries, one of the crowd called thickly to Mr. Dalrymple, "It's all right, guv'ner. Don't mean no 'arm, more'n suckin'-doves. Gospel meetin' just a-startin' dahn 'ere, an' thought as p'raps ye'd like to join in."

In an effusion of pure courtesy he offered to conduct them to the spot, and later on, should they be so inclined, show them all the sequestered beauty and hidden objects of interest of Vernal Avenue. "Wuth seein', guv'ner," he declared. "Show ye where Bill the lurcher was took arter doin' for two coppers an' puttin' three more on the pension-list, all for to save a pal. Likewise where the 'tec made the flyin' leap out'n the second-floor winder in the haste to get back to 'is wife an' family 'cos Loo

Tucker wanted ter lay lovin' 'ands on 'im; interjuce ye to Loo."

These civilities being also declined, one of the group gently hustled Mr. Potts to set business going, and in the act was almost jerked off his feet by a strong rude hand on his collar behind.

"Pardon me," said Mr. Dalrymple over the aggressor's shoulder, "but is it quite fair to start a scrimmage without warning? Besides, is it worth while?"

"Wot d'ye mean, ye bloomin' white choker?" the man demanded, turning the murderous face of the foiled thief. As he spoke he jerked himself half round, and a fist like a trip-hammer struck out in the customary way. Contrary to intention, however, it went harmlessly into the air at a touch from below that suggested a most unclerical knowledge of the prize-ring.

"I don't want trouble," Mr. Dalrymple explained quietly; "but no hooliganism, please. There," pushing the other off, "you kindly go and mind your own business, and let those who don't meddle with you alone, lest worse befall you."

"I'll lay you flat, that's wot I'll do, an' it's wot ye bloomin' well deserve," the man retorted, adding in the pungent-pictorial style of Vernal Avenue a commentary on his adversary's facial appearance, with a concise account of the sort of person he must have had for a father. Asaph and B. B. bristled in defence, but Mr. Dalrymple motioned them to

hold back. A judicious firmness, a serene face (however hard the heart might beat) would make for peace; but a belligerent mien would merely be an incitement to homicide. In three seconds the crowd had trebled, and from the midst all at once rose a husky laugh.

"It's the fightin' passon, that's 'oo it is ye've got 'old of," a hoarse voice added.

There was a hush, followed instantly by a sough of excitement and a shuffling of many feet as the owners pressed and craned to see. For the fame of the fighting parson had reached local votaries of "the fancy" who had hoped a little against hope to meet him in sportsman-fashion, and behold of a sudden the man performing in character! Prize-fighters they had seen in dozens, from the belted favourites of Royalty to dosshouse bullies (heroes fallen out of favour), heads of backyard-round-the-corner-punching-shops, chuckers-out, and hireling threepenny "minders"; but a master of the science whose humour it was to masquerade in a white choker and clerical wideawake was novel enough to cause a flutter even in the precincts of Vernal Avenue.

A challenge would indubitably have been issued on the spot but for a fresh incident that diverted attention. Round the corner swung a procession that was not only hilarious in itself, but the cause of hilarity in spectators. In the midst appeared an inflamed face and a mass of tangled tresses such

as might have belonged to Medusa after a bout of ardent waters, a tussle with a sister fury, and a midnight frolic in a muddy ditch. As a matter of fact, they belonged to Sal, then proceeding to a place of temporary retirement under the escort of Timothy O'Ryan and a Cockney member of the force. As she resisted with all her powers, the progress was slow and the fun exhilarating.

"Come along wid ye, me jewel," Tim was saying, "or it's afther laying ye out on a stritcher we'll have to be. Bad scran to ye for an ould mule, what ails ye at my shinbone?"

Sal screeched in triumph to see him limp from her booting, and the crowd yelled joyously for encouragement. Tim's comrade gave Sal a professional twist, and by way of protest she threw herself on the ground, whereupon the crowd poured a running fire of sarcasm on the police for their valour in fighting a woman on the slender odds of two to one. Slipping forward in the interest of law and order, Mr. Dalrymple spoke sympathetically in Tim's ear.

"A hard bit of work, constable," he said.

"Och, and is that yersilf, sorr?" Tim returned, lifting a crimson face. "Be the powers, hard's not the word at all at all. A man on the trampeze is throublesome enough goin' to the lock-up, but a woman full av drink and wickedness has more original sin av a worse kind than ten men wid divils in thim. Come along, me spoiled beauty. Ye've got to march. And ye needn't be showin' off yer ankles; there's

purtier goin' round. Hoult her petticoats tight, and moind her heels; she's a prize 'un at the kickin'."

Sal would have made a public statement of her wrongs, but for once the Metropolitan Police were inexorable, and she was borne onward imprecating fiercely. In the rear of the procession, like a half-attached hanger-on, marched one who to an expression of alert interest added unconsciously a sense of dimly understood sorrow. It was Dolf. He had seen Mr. Dalrymple, and on the first opportunity stepped forward, saluting him.

"Nice sort of muver for a fellow to 'ave, ain't she, sir?" he remarked agreeably.

Mr. Dalrymple looked down with a feeling of "God help you." "Yes," he sighed. "Do you know what the trouble is now?"

"Kick-up with Miry," Dolf replied, as one who should say, "Women are always giving trouble." "You know, sir, as Miry took 'er in arter we was chucked from Beulah Place. You might think from that they was friends, but they wasn't, and Miry only done it 'cos St. Patrick asked 'er. Wot set 'em off now I'm sure I don't know—jawin' likely—but when I went round a little while ago to see 'ow things was a-goin', there they was 'ard at it a-callin' each other names, an' the langwidge was fit to make any ornery man feel warm, I tell 'e. Well, muver she makes for Miry's top-dressin' an' Miry she 'its out, an' afore ye could wink muver was in the street 'owlin' 'bout wot

she'd do. Next thing she was took, and,"—added Dolf, with a wave of his hand, "there she is—safe for a week's 'ard, I should think. Ullo! gennleman wants 'e, sir."

From the other side of the street Asaph was crossing in haste and obvious agitation, and beyond, on the farther pavement, stood Mr. Potts, a picture of blank, helpless astonishment. He had put his hand into his watch-pocket to ascertain the time, and lo! the watch was gone. For the first time in his life Ephraim Potts was dumfounded.

Mr. Dalrymple's first impulse was to collar the thief, but the crowd had melted as miraculously as it gathered. A few gamins and tatterdemalions remained in a snickering enjoyment, but he knew as well as if he saw the insides of their pockets that the watch was not among them.

"All we can do is to inform the police," he said, "and there's not an instant to be lost."

In urgent haste the quartette followed Sal's procession to the police station, where a civil and obliging Inspector officially wrote down particulars of the robbery, with a minute description of a watch which represented the acme of New York workmanship in gold and jewels. For intrinsic worth and sentimental association the treasure was precious to Mr. Potts; but the loss was the least part of his humiliation, and he called himself an idiot of many kinds for being caught napping.

"Can't make out how they did it," he repeated

again and again. "Been in some of the worst dens in New York, and never was done like this before, never."

"Then there are worse places than Wall Street after all, Potts," put in B. B., who bore his friend's affliction with charming grace and fortitude. "Henceforth you cannot deny there are smart people even in England."

Out of the fulness of knowledge the Inspector gave some pertinent examples of the smartness of Vernal Avenue, and on the information thus supplied B. B. offered long odds against the chance of recovering the watch. Mr. Potts's answer was to put down a piece of gold for the Police Orphanage.

"You know my friend Mr. Dalrymple?" he said.

"Oh! yes, sir, we all know Mr. Dalrymple," replied the Inspector, marvelling at a man who could suffer robbery and give a voluntary subscription in the same hour.

"Very well," said Mr. Potts, as if he were closing a deal on 'Change, "when you've recovered my stolen property please communicate with him."

"Very good, sir," the Inspector returned, gazing with steady eyes. He was not sure whether he understood Potts; he was certain Potts did not understand Vernal Avenue. But, of course, it was impossible to go into discouraging explanations with a gentleman so agreeably liberal in spite of losses. It is an excellent rule to let the innocent remain in their innocence. To enlighten Mr. Potts

would only incite him to make reflections on the efficiency of the Metropolitan Police, and perhaps invidious comparisons with the force of New York. Therefore the Inspector behaved discreetly. With extra-official courtesy Mr. Potts was informed that neither pains nor cost would be spared to put him again in possession of his lost watch. On that general assurance the party returned once more to the street.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE PRICE OF A SORREL COLT

MR. POTTS and Asaph, having more than satisfied their zest for adventure, went home to Park Lane. But Bunting returned with Mr. Dalrymple to the Noncon. mission to watch the dispensing of a hampered charity. When at last the day's work was over, that is to say, when the maimed and the halt, the sick, the destitute, and the miserable were comforted according to the resources of an exiguous store, B. B. remarked with unwonted ardour, "If you don't mind, Mr. Dalrymple, I'd like five minutes' straight talk with you. This is a new experience, and I'm interested."

"As many minutes as you like, Mr. Bunting, and the straighter the talk the better," was the response.

"Thank you, but not here. You'll come right along to my hotel and have dinner with me. We'll get ensconced in some side nook by ourselves, where we can talk as we like. I want it very much."

Mr. Dalrymple cast a rueful glance over his attire.

"I'm not dressed," he pleaded.

"I guess a hungry man is always dressed for dinner," B. B. rejoined blithely.

It happened that by straining a point Mr. Dalrymple could be free for the evening. So instead of turning into the dingy lodging for the prandial chop he went westward in a hansom.

"Haven't this in the East End, I reckon?" remarked B. B. as the pair passed into the sumptuous glow of an hotel in the region of Piccadilly.

"No," returned Mr. Dalrymple. "In all the East End we haven't a single hotel."

"You haven't, eh?" rejoined B. B. "No hotels, but plenty of dramshops. I guess the devil does a roaring trade there."

They got the side nook, with a table to themselves.

"Johnny," said B. B. graciously to the waiter, "we've taken this table exclusively—until we quit. You understand?" Johnny bowed, smiling.

"Knows what he's up to," remarked B. B., nodding at Johnny's retreating figure. "This European system of tips is unadulterated corruption. But don't seem possible to get what you want without it.

"Go right ahead and eat," the host observed in the next breath to Mr. Dalrymple. "Mustn't spoil your dinner. Every man is entitled to one square meal a day. Providence meant it, and, personally, I prefer to make it dinner."

But long before dessert was reached he was at business; for an up-to-date American does two

things at once as naturally and much more easily than the average Briton does one thing.

"Mrs. Cadwallader Roy made me promise to stay," he told his new friend, "and I can see she knew what she was about. Smart woman, I tell you. I've known Lena Savoury ever since she was so high, and I never saw the time when there were any cobwebs about her eyes. If she were a man, she'd be one of the biggest hustlers in the States. Feel kind of sorry at times over the way a woman's handicapped. Well, she appears to have made out something of what we've seen to-day. I'm glad I stayed; but I tell you frankly I had no idea Britannia kept her back premises in such a mess. Thought the old dame was quite decent and respectable right through. Appears she whitewashes her front doorstep and leaves the back to gather foulness. Can't be much fun for you, sir, round there."

"Not much," said Mr. Dalrymple.

"And I guess there's just as little loot."

"That's hardly my game," Mr. Dalrymple replied quickly. "I'm content to eat my bread dry, if need be."

"And so far's I can make out, you have just as much of that felicity as ever you want. Your colleague, Mr. Emmet, made Mrs. Cadwallader Roy think of a passage in Heine. What you led us through to-day made me think of one in Ruskin. It's where he says that if all at once, on the merriment of a London dinner-party, the walls were to open

and the sufferers of every description, the mangled victims of the upper world, were to be carried in and laid one beside each guest, what a scene of amazement and horror there would be. Something like that has been done for us. I suppose what we saw is typical?"

"Of the lighter and brighter side of slum life—yes," was the reply.

"The lighter and brighter side," repeated B. B.; "and what's the rest? Inferno pure and simple, eh?"

"Very nearly. You saw but a little. There is much that I for one would not venture to show you."

"Great Scot! Should think perdition itself would be a blessed change."

"Sometimes I have been almost compelled to think so myself," Mr. Dalrymple owned. "The darkest theology never devised worse pains for the lost than tens of thousands of English men, women, and children are suffering at this minute."

"Have you no Government?" demanded B. B.; "or is your Government concerned only with feathers and paint and the tickling of the voter? I thought, too, you had Churches in this country. What are they doing? Smiling on lace and ruffles?"

"You saw Mr. Emmet, sir," Mr. Dalrymple replied. "You also saw my accommodation for lace and ruffles. We can only answer for ourselves. I do not constitute myself a judge. Perhaps the Churches are not so well informed as they might be regarding

certain things—poisonous drugs, let us say, that are corrupting the body politic—practices that make earth a hell to millions—but they mean well. Oh, yes, they mean well!"

"Shall we say they're a little like somnambulists, walking a good deal in the dark?" smiled Mr. Bunting. "One thing an outsider like myself notices is this, they seem to be under the extraordinary delusion that the heathen are somewhere far beyond seas, and all the while the worst heathendom in the world rages at their own doors. Have they neither eyes nor ears? It's a curious kind of fatuity, and contains rather more than the usual percentage of irony. I can see, of course," he went on, marking the flush on Mr. Dalrymple's face, "that the Church —I speak generally—is faced by enormous difficulties. Not being an Atlas, she can't quite carry the world on her shoulders. Finding that impossible, she perhaps loses heart and becomes subject to a kind of insidious sloth. Besides, we mustn't forget that she's got to live as best she can, like the rest of us."

"I wish, sir, all critics were so fair," said Mr. Dalrymple.

"Add that you wish critics had less reason to criticise," rejoined Mr. Bunting, "and you and I will be at an understanding in no time. But let us return to the concrete. What I fancy is hardest on you, sir, and on your friend Mr. Emmet, is indifference plus ignorance plus selfishness, and as regards your slums, plus inert or muddle-headed officialdom."

Mr. Dalrymple nodded.

"Something like this, isn't it?" proceeded Mr. Bunting. "The children of worldly wisdom, being exceeding wise in their generation, get themselves appointed to fat sinecures and posts of honour, and then make it their business to hold on."

With an air of mock gravity he invited Mr. Dalrymple to apply as much of this as he thought fit to statesmen, aldermen, councillors of all degrees and kinds, boards of management, permanent officials, caucuses, Tammany Halls, and what not.

"There is a great art," he said, "the art of riding on the shoulders of others, which brings successful practitioners first prosperity and afterwards praise in double-leaded leading articles, and banquets, and ovations, and titles, and the fat of the land generally at 50 per cent. off cost price. Nor is that all; for when they die public places are cumbered with statues to their memory, and their piety is commemorated in church tablets and stained-glass windows, so that future generations may be encouraged in the worship of true greatness, which, being translated, means the knack of minding number one."

"You smile," continued B. B., "as if I were entertaining you with a fiction. Well! for sake of good-fellowship let us suppose Voltaire meant no gibe in the remark of Pangloss that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds; also that your own poet is right about the upward march of Creation,

and that the thousand and one preachers who so zealously tell us all we ought to do are hanging by the angel-wings of truth. I wouldn't discredit philosopher. poet or preacher. The world moves: let us fancy it soars. Meanwhile (such is the diabolic irony of things) ambition treads down, injustice usurps, avarice seizes, perverted love works havoc like a wild beast, spoil speedeth, prey hasteth—in a word, there are slums in which millions of our brothers and sisters seem to have but the alternative of death or crime. You've shown me some of them, and I've heard of more; perhaps I may see more yet as well. These are present conditions, and all the beadles and councillors and divinely ordained rulers, with the whole solid phalanx of permanent officials, dozing in digestive torpor, lay their hands on their hearts and turn their eyes to heaven, saying piously, as if it were a litany, 'Yes, it's a pity, a grievous pity; but so it has been decreed, and what has been decreed you cannot prevent.' Kismet. Let us be at peace, let us eat and drink, and enjoy our honours and our pensions while it is called to-day. To-morrow none knows what may happen."

Mr. Dalrymple nodded sorrowfully, B. B. was getting home.

"Now," he pursued warmly, "that is the sort of mockery that makes me sick. Sometimes I think, sir, that the Scribes and Pharisees have returned in a new guise. You work for reform. Have you ever considered that in a reformed state three-fourths of

the salaried folk who bully the public would be without cribs or incomes? Do you think they'd aid in cutting their own throats? There's a lot of boodle in the annual expenditure of a great nation. My beloved country furnishes some object-lessons there."

"The point is new," said Mr. Dalrymple thoughtfully.

"True as well as new, I think," rejoined Mr. Bunting pleasantly. "Reform the world, and you cut down public expenditure; cut down public expenditure, and you reduce the salary-list; reduce the salary-list, and——"

"I see the logical conclusion," put in Mr. Dalrymple. "I wish I could prove you wrong."

"Personally," observed Mr. Bunting, with an air of sad resignation, "I cherish no hope whatever that the millennium will arrive in my time. Sacrifice is necessary to its coming, and sacrifice doesn't just yet come naturally to human nature; so things go on the matrimonial principle 'to have and to hold.' The world still proclaims—

> The good old rule,
> . . . The simple plan,
> That they should take who have the power,
> And they should keep who can.

Hence it comes, my friend, you were able to show me the sights I saw to-day. At times I could not help wondering whether Christianity itself is not beginning to fare hardly."

"Oh! I hope not," cried Mr. Dalrymple fervently.

"Your hope is mine," said Mr. Bunting, "and we won't dwell on the point. Perhaps I only felt a passing tremor of fear, for to-day's revelations amazed and frightened just a little bit, as the children say. What I was getting at now is the personal difficulty of men like yourself in the task of uplifting a fallen world. Ever since infancy, Mr. Dalrymple, I have rubbed shoulders pretty hard with my fellow-sinners, and I've always tried to keep one eye open for impartial observation. I have been looking round under your guidance, and my notion is that what with vested interests fortified like citadels, avarice working double tides, friend Bumble sitting tight, lust of gain, lust of pleasure, indolence, ignorance, apathy, original and acquired sin, you've got your work cut out, with considerable odds and ends over. That is my view. Will you pardon me if I ask what your resources are?"

"Pretty much what you saw," answered Mr. Dalrymple.

"Then you're trying to carry on a very big business on a very small capital!"

"Yes," was the prompt response. "It's the capital that's wanting. I should like to catch a millionaire."

B. B. laughed quietly.

"Well," he said, "I guess Potts is the article you want; only remember that Potts won't move under a minimum of five per cent. and a whacking bonus."

"And I'm afraid," remarked Mr. Dalrymple, "that

after his late experiences he's had enough of us. I must say he took his loss with rare good humour."

"Oh! Potts is not without Christian graces," returned B. B. "Fact is, he's been too long in Wall Street to worry over trifles. For your purposes it's possible he'd be a hard eel to skin. All the time I've known him, Ephraim Potts has been consistently on the make."

Mr. Dalrymple's face was placid; but his heart was thumping. It was with the sensations of one taking a giddy leap that he said, "Don't you think, sir, we might come nearer home?"

Mr. Bunting slowly adjusted the edge of his serviette inside his collar.

"You mean me?" he said, without surprise or trace of other emotion. "Don't forget that in Potts you have a man of solid affairs. If there's business to be done, he's the man to do it. I'm, as you see, just a sort of universal tramp. Fact is, when my father died, the family stopped going every day to the office. I've been mostly a wanderer ever since. Haven't got any fixed habits or employments."

"And therefore more in our way than Mr. Potts," put in Mr. Dalrymple. Having taken the first fence safely, he was encouraged to go on.

"Don't you go and make any mistake, sir," Mr. Bunting warned him. "I'm just as keen as Potts for a return on investments. Men are mostly made in selfishness, and I'm human to the extent of being

exceedingly like my neighbours. But, sir," and he suddenly sat up, "I'll tell you one thing, I admire a man whose heart prompts him to fight—for others. We can all fight for ourselves, more or less ; the man who voluntarily fights for others—voluntarily bears a cross—is a hero. That's my sentiment."

He fell back into his old, half-listless attitude, and began to draw imaginary geometrical figures with a dessert-fork.

"Yes," said Mr. Dalrymple breathlessly, as if springing to help out a halting purpose.

"I was thinking," responded Mr. Bunting with exasperating deliberation, "of that colt of Lord Askery's. Didn't know I had my eye on horse-racing, eh? Well! we've been dickering over that colt—a five thousand dollar deal—and come to think of it, I don't know that the article is much in my line after all I'm not at all sure I should feel at home among a host of coronets at Newmarket."

Mr. Dalrymple strove mightily to keep his feelings in hand ; but in fact he had not been so excited since coming out of the football scrimmage at Glasgow fifteen years before without knowing that his collar-bone was fractured.

"No," B. B. went on, with his maddening deliberation, "I don't feel certain of being born to make a figure on the turf, and I'd hate to scrape fifth fiddle, as you might say, even when a prince or a duke scraped first. Why, Mr. Dalrymple, what's the matter?"

Mr. Dalrymple had slid forward till he sat on the very edge of his chair, and his eyes were fixed with a glowing intensity on his companion's face.

"I was thinking too," he said in a kind of gasp.

"That if the deal doesn't come off there's a thousand guineas or so lying idle," smiled Mr. Bunting. "Well, I guess that sorrel colt's not going to be owned by me."

He leaned across the table, looking straight into Mr. Dalrymple's eyes, and he read their ardent pleading as clearly as if it were printed. All at once he shot out his hand.

"I know," he said, with an odd thrill of the voice. "Say—shake hands."

The two clasped in a wringing grip; then both rose hastily and walked silently and swiftly away.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A PROVIDENTIAL ILLNESS AND A WOMAN'S GOSPEL

FOR private and cogent reasons Mr. Herstein held aloof from the folly of that descent into Tartarus. On the morning of his friends' mad exploit he was smitten without warning by dire illness, and naturally could not endure the thought of his daughter's absence, even to gratify so dear and charming a friend as Mrs. Cadwallader Roy. Rachel therefore telephoned her distress to Park Lane, and Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, ruffling her brows over the provoking perversity of people in falling ill at the wrong moment, in turn telephoned her regrets and disappointment to Sir Sydney Dormer. She could not possibly venture into Savagedom without a companion of her own sex, and there was no time to procure one. Lying in the stress of sickness, Mr. Herstein ruminated, not unpleasantly, on the peril he had averted.

In the evening, Asaph, breaking other engagements, cunningly deputed himself as his sister's ambassador to make personal inquiries for Rachel's patient. He had the good fortune to find Miss

Herstein at the grand piano, solacing herself with songs of Israel that called up an immemorial past of tradition and romance.

She returned to the present with a sudden vivid overflow of colour. Asaph did not blush. Like every true American, he abandoned that childish weakness with the pap and the feeding-bottle. All the same, his pulses also beat to a rapturous music. A second the pair looked meaningly into each other's eyes; then sat down in an electric self-consciousness. She was beautiful, with a wondrous bewitching beauty, this black-eyed, black-haired daughter of Judah; he was very fascinating, this purposeful, straight-going young American. Such was the mutual current of feeling, and neither thought of race prejudice.

The speech was, of course, of the invalid. Rachel told how dreadfully he had frightened her, just as she was about to get ready for the expedition; and how he had positively forbidden her to send for a doctor, declaring the sight of one would kill him.

"And, sure enough, he's better," she was able to tell her visitor. "Isn't it strange how vehemently he objected to a doctor?"

"Not at all," Asaph assured her. "Not at all." And with his nation's promptitude proceeded to explain how certain diseases, coming suddenly and surprising the nerve-centres, momentarily produce in the patient all manner of hallucinations and prejudices. Rachel bent towards him in a rapt attention;

and thus encouraged, Mr. Savoury gave an entrancing lecture on pathology, dexterously inventing where knowledge failed, and pictorially embellishing where science was bald.

From an exposition of the cause and caprice of disease he passed to the day's adventures in Alsatia, and it seemed that Rachel forgot to breathe in the absorption of listening. It may have been intuition, it may have been something more commonplace and tangible, but he had hardly started when the fact became known in a certain bedroom above. Then immediately the sick man rose, and with a celerity which would have amazed his devoted morning nurse got into dressing-gown and slippers and descended on the drawing-room. Entering with the weak step of an invalid, he surprised its inmates into cries about his imprudence, but he calmed their alarm by assuring them he was better, much better. Asaph politely gave an arm to cross the great room, and Rachel dutifully set a chair.

"There, there," he said, seating himself with a sigh of satisfaction. "Thank you. It is almost worth while being ill, Mr. Savoury, for the sake of being nursed like a baby again. You were in the East End to-day?"

"Yes, sir," Asaph replied; "and I was just telling Miss Herstein a little of what we saw. We were greatly disappointed in not having her with us."

"She could not leave me, of course," said Mr. Herstein. "It was a sudden seizure. These things take us unaware. And did you see much?"

"A good deal. We went through Beulah Place—you know it, sir?"

Mr. Herstein brought the tips of his fingers together and nodded.

"Also several other quarters run on similar lines. We went in and out of a great many houses, too—if they deserve that name that are rather worse than ordinary sties."

"I wonder such places are tolerated," cried Rachel warmly. "Surely there is money enough in England to enable people to live as—a little as they ought to live."

Her father looked at her curiously.

"Oh! yes," he assented. "There's plenty of money in England. The English are a very rich people."

"And a very poor, by what we've seen to-day," remarked Asaph.

"That's just it," said Rachel, with the absurdity of a socialist. "There never was so much money or so much poverty before. And I think it's a great shame that our slums should be as they are. If I had my way I'd make those who are responsible change places with their victims for a while. That would teach them.

Mr. Herstein stared ambiguously, wondering who had hocussed the apple of his eye. At the same time, by a complicated process all his own, he thought how glibly delusion may condemn itself and how little wisdom there may be in much eloquence. He would not say that words on the tongue of ignorance were as a boomerang in the

hands of a fool: for the heresy came from the mouth of his daughter. But how had she been infected? Was Asaph guilty, was Mrs. Cadwallader Roy? or did the guilt lie with the foxes in clerical collars? The fate of Abner and Amasa to all intermeddlers! Fair division, exchange of places, indeed! How would she feel without her luxurious rooms, her costly amusements, her pictures and bric-à-brac, her carriages and horses, her rich friends to grin in a piqued admiration of her grandeur? He had known what she never knew, what she could not so much as imagine, the bitterness of hunger and cold, the bed of rags in the reeking stew, with accompaniments not to be named. He had left all that far behind. But supposing he had been a snivelling sentimentalist, allowing others to jostle and oust him, withholding his hand when fortune cried "grasp," would she that evening be preaching her pretty folly among downy cushions? Yet he thanked Heaven that some things are hidden from the eye of affection as well as the eye of malevolence.

She went on in glowing indignation, and Mr. Herstein debated with himself for half a minute whether to give her rein or pull her up peremptorily, even at the cost of a jar to her feelings. He decided tentatively for a free rein. There could be small danger while he was by. Besides, it would be amusing and might possibly be edifying to see his eastern estates through the eyes of others. He turned suavely to Asaph.

"My daughter seems moved by what you have told her," he remarked.

"And yet I've told but very little," was the response. "If I did more than touch the outer hem of the garment of truth, Miss Herstein would be shocked and offended."

"You must not rush to conclusions, Mr. Savoury," Rachel interpolated with a catch of the breath.

"Well," rejoined Asaph, "the defect is perhaps on my side. Appears to me the man hasn't been born who could tell the truth, I mean the whole truth, about your East End. What struck me as much as anything was how little people know of it. Mr. Dalrymple says the general ignorance is such that any man who stated facts as they are would be condemned out of hand as a lineal descendant of Ananias and Sapphira. For that reason he's often silent himself when he feels he ought to speak out."

"Mr. Dalreemple," said Mr. Herstein, "is excessively modest. Is it his usual way?"

"Don't know about that, sir," Asaph laughed. "But he seems a thoroughly good fellow. An athlete, too. You should have seen him twist a fellow who tried to hustle Potts. In the end, however, Potts was relieved of his watch—unconsciously on his part."

Mr. Herstein opened his eyes, and the flicker of a smile crossed his dark face. Ah! yes, people who went into wild beasts' cages must expect to be clawed, and Potts, of all men in the world, ought

to have had more sense. With an expression of polite regret Mr. Herstein returned to the enemy.

"You were talking of this Mr. Dalreemple," he said. "Is he an—an interesting person?"

"Very," returned Asaph, promptly and emphatically. "Knows his way about, too. What he showed us, Miss Herstein, would give you the horrors."

"There, what did I tell you, Rachel?" cried her father. "Did I not say it would be very, very disagreeable?"

"It was," said Asaph. "If one went for light pastime the experiment would be a gruesome failure. Yet in a sort of way we enjoyed it; at any rate we were interested, some of us. Mr. Bunting, for instance, was intensely interested, and we persevered like Christian in the Slough of Despond till we came to a place called Vernal Avenue; pretty name, isn't it? That was too much even for Mr. Dalrymple, and he halted. It was there Potts lost his watch. May have heard of the place, sir?"

"Why did he halt there?" Rachel asked, the light of excitement in her eye.

"Because he didn't want to have the trouble of holding a funeral service over us. Seems it's one of the most villainous dens in all London. Got a glimpse of the deputy-providence of the place—the bully who takes the pay and does the dirty work for the directing genius, who prefers to remain in the dark. You're not getting bad again, sir, I hope?"

Mr. Herstein was wriggling like a man on thorns, but he answered bravely:

"No, thank you, Mr. Savoury. Go on, please. Did you come to speech with this man?"

"Didn't get the chance," replied Asaph. "Passed us, looking as if he'd like to take us quietly aside and cut our throats."

Mr. Herstein breathed a long soft breath of relief. Thank Heaven, Meckles was still Meckles.

"Mr. Dalrymple told us about the fellow," Asaph pursued. "Nobody seems to be quite sure who employs him. There are all sorts of tales of mystery, each more darkly suggestive than the other. The one indubitable fact appears to be that he's the instrument and agent of some one who has consummated, brought to absolute perfection the art of putting on the screw. They talk of us financiers, sir, but we're in a state of pristine innocence; in the words of a Vernal Avenue gentleman we're sucking doves, compared with the East End sweater. I've a good mind," he added, laughing, "to go to him for lessons."

"The monster," said Rachel passionately. "I call it shameful—shameful."

There are things which be too hard for flesh and blood when they have to be borne secretly, even if one be master of the unconquerable will and the inscrutable face. Mr. Herstein rose feebly, saying he did not feel so well as he'd like, and apologised to Asaph for being obliged to end so interesting a conversation and claim the attention of Rachel.

CHAPTER XXXIV

NUMBER ONE AT THE CHERRY TREE. LOVE AND A MERRY-GO-ROUND

IN the evening dusk exactly a week later a figure, most voluminously attired, halted at the head of Vernal Avenue, and gazed with an air of indecision into its squalid gloom. It was Pickens just returned after one of his periodical visits to the country, and now considering within himself what changes time, vicissitude, and the unstable nature of things were likely to have produced during his brief absence. There were other things on his mind which need not be named at present.

In his pocket, neatly folded, lay an afternoon paper of the variety called "yellow," and his thoughts ran on an item of news it contained under the startling caption by which this species of journal essays to make the public flesh creep. This was a prodigious account of a little affair in a watering-place whither London fashion at certain seasons carries its jewels for a whiff of sea air. A transatlantic journalist, lately imported to instruct

the British press in the art of getting up sensations, took the matter in hand, and thus what would otherwise have passed as a mere domestic exploit assumed the significance of a national event. Mr. Pickens had seen the apostle of luridness, and marked his way of getting to business; that is to say, his energy in rushing round, his skill in putting questions, in stimulating sluggish imaginations, and, finally, in evolving blood-curdling details from an ignorance and a confusion that seemed to promise nothing, with a gratuitous theory of crime expressly for the benefit of Scotland Yard. In the train returning to town Pickens read the three throbbing columns, with vivid appreciation. He felt the electric thrill of the narrative, admired its swing and colour, its ingenuity, and its hurtling epithets just as he had admired its author's resource. But the facts and deductions amused him. He chuckled softly as he thought of certain "pals" gloating over the knowing sketch and the cocksure theories. Lord! wouldn't they laugh!

The business now was to find them. They might be from home, they might have changed their addresses, they might be temporarily invisible—life is full of exigencies that bring the unexpected to pass. In these circumstances an open search would savour of indelicacy. Besides, Mr. Pickens's innate modesty made him averse at the moment to anything in the nature of a public demonstration in his own honour. As he stood with a look and feeling of

perplexity, a procession went past, with concertina, mouth-organ, bird-warblers, and many-throated discordancy. Pickens glanced keenly to ascertain whether he knew any of the boisterous merrymakers, and was congratulating himself they were all strangers, when someone hailed him familiarly, and, looking down, he beheld Dolf. Making a virtue of necessity, he expressed his royal pleasure at the meeting, and proceeded, in the manner of the returned traveller, to ask after the welfare of friends. When Dolf had given information concerning the recent movements of a round dozen, he remarked, not without a hint of pique:

"You ain't arskin' for muver."

In the pressure of events Pickens had forgotten Sal, but he politely made amends by hoping she was well and prosperous.

"Bin keepin' pretty steady, eh?" he said, grinning on the boy.

"Don't know 'bout keepin' steady," Dolf replied; "but she's bin took again."

"Oh," rejoined Pickens, with sudden animation. "Wot for?"

"Some row with Miry," Dolf returned, and related what he knew of the cause of battle.

"Oughter 'ave more sense'n to be rowin' with Miry," Pickens observed severely. "Why, Miry'd give a full-growed man all 'e could do if the fur was up, an' many a man more. Wot was the consekince?"

"Five bob or a week's 'ard," answered Dolf.

"Out yet?" inquired Pickens, seeing a personal bearing in the action of the law.

"Wasn't in," cried Dolf. "Wot d'ye think? The Scotch 'un, 'e goes to the court mission'ry, an' the court mission'ry 'e planks down the five bob so's muver could get takin' care of me." Dolf laughed. "You should a seen 'er fice when the fine was paid. She was fit to drop with s'prise."

Pickens paused a moment thoughtfully, and then asked:

"Where is she now?"

"Oh, 'e's got her," was the reply; "an' s'far's I can make out, 'e's in a jolly blue-funk wot to do with 'er."

Pickens paused again, with the same thoughtful expression; then he took Dolf aside into the shadow of a wall, and with grave injunctions of secrecy, gave him a message to be delivered at a certain address in Vernal Avenue.

"Second floor back," said Pickens in a low voice. "Two knocks and a whistle—so. If an ole lidy, kind of watery 'bout the eyes an' tottery 'bout the legs an' sunthin' the matter with 'er nose, asks fierce like wot yer makin' a row for, just you smile comfortable an' say as Number One's at the Cherry Tree awaitin' 'is friends. That'll be enough."

"An' if the ole lidy don't show 'er beautiful phiz?" inquired Dolf.

"Then you just scoot back to the Scotch 'un.

Dolfie," added Pickens playfully, "ever 'eard of jam tarts?"

"Wot yer a-givin' us?" Dolf retorted, his mouth beginning to water.

"Don't know 'ow you feel 'bout it," Pickens remarked, slipping a small silver coin into the boy's hand. "But when I was a nipper like you I was dead gone on jam tarts; 'peared to be allus peckish for that kind of grub. Ah! there 'e are," as Dolf in a dancing joy signified a like taste and appetite; "thought as boys was still boys. Well, when ye've wiped yer mouth arter disposin' of that lot that's awaitin' round the corner, ye needn't trouble tellin' anybody as ye've seen me. I'll call on the Scotch 'un on my own 'ook. An', Dolfie, I forgot to say that if the ole woman purtends to be 'ard of 'earin', don't you be 'ollerin at 'er. Work 'er easy, an' she'll come round. Got to be 'ard of 'earin' at times. If she ain't sure of 'e, just you say as yer my son—for the time bein', you understand. That'll fetch 'er."

"Right you are," returned Dolf. "Number One at the Cherry Tree awaitin' 'is friends—I know," and he was off at a run.

Pickens had scarcely got over his first glass with the bull-necked landlord of the Cherry Tree when his friends began to drop in casually, and one by one go through the formality of expressing surprise and delight at finding him there. When the number was complete, the host delicately retired, and no

sooner had the door closed behind him than there came a change which would have astonished a stranger if by any chance he were permitted to enter that sanctuary of the elect. He would have noted that the air of careless jollity gave place, as by magic, to a breathless intensity of interest and the manner of men in conspiracy. Moreover, in what he heard he would have groped in vain for a meaning, though the words were common English words. How could he know that they ran the whole gamut of the forbidden, and expressed the deadliest designs under the guise of childish innocence or idiotic gabble?

In the midst of the conference the landlord entered finger on lip, as in response to a call, and the company instantly whipped back to a roisterous joviality. A representative of Scotland Yard was at the bar outside. There was nothing to be disturbed about, and the company kept their seats—all save one, who vanished like a ghost through a back aperture, a disappearance of which the others took no notice whatever. Scotland Yard was searching for Potts's watch, and on some absurd hypothesis had thought of the Cherry Tree as a possible home or resting-place for strayed timepieces.

Presently Mr. Pickens, having satisfied the instinct of sociality, stepped forth beaming, saluted Scotland Yard like an old chum, and was smitten by a giant hand on the back.

"Attention! Right about wheel! Thought that

would gar ye jump," said the Glasgow man with a chuckle. "And how's the demented world usin' ye this long while? Been off for a holiday, a'm hearin'."

"Yes," Pickens returned, feeling that the welcome might have been more happily put. "An' 'ow goes it with you?"

"As ye see, preparin' for the eight hours' shift in that hard-used bed o' mine. "Ye'll be dry after traivellin'. What's it to be? For mysel', bearin' in mind the great truth that whiskey and freedom gang together, a'm keeping to the drop Scotch. It's safest. But there's all sorts here. Give it a name."

He craved the honour of drinking with Scotland Yard, but Scotland Yard may not be convivial during official hours, which, for various reasons, mainly attributable to the fallen state of man, number exactly twenty-four to the day. Pickens was also obliged to decline.

"On the tee-tote, matey," he answered gravely.

"Ginger pop, eh?" cried the Glasgow man. "Well, it's a serious thing when a man o' your colour goes off his liquor. You're not gettin' fey, are ye?"

But Pickens was moving off, and the Glasgow man called after him:

"A'm sayin' I want a word with you." He emptied his glass at a gulp, and the two went out together.

"Miry's been asking for ye," the Glasgow man remarked as soon as they were outside.

"Oh!" said Pickens with a start.

"A'll just tell ye what for," the Glasgow man went on, lest Pickens might be tempted to wrong conclusions. "Mr. Dalrymple round here—that's my friend the Scotch minister, ye ken—has some ploy on hand, and Miry's helpin'. It's about that."

He stopped to light a clay pipe, sucked for a moment with terrific energy, and then, as it were casually, observed that Miry was the sort of girl a man might conceivably find it in his heart to admire. Pickens answered with a tantalising guffaw.

"Ye've known worse," said the Glasgow man with sudden keenness.

"Quite right," assented Pickens. "Since ye ask me, I've knowed wuss."

"I mind there was something atween ye," the Glasgow man said, his eyes fast on the other.

"Oh, bless 'e," replied Pickens, with the air of a man who for good or ill has renounced the past, "that was ages an' ages ago, 'fore Miry was spoiled by takin' on along of the passons."

"That confounded pipe's wrong again," cried the Glasgow man irrelevantly. He applied another match, pulled till he had raised a column of smoke, and then in a pant, as if out of breath, said:

"Lost conceit o' her. I've lost conceit o' more than one in my day mysel'. I declare that pipe's

like a stuffed chimney." The bowl came down face first on the open palm ; then he pulled with renewed ferocity, and went on :

"Listen, if ye dinna be speakin' o't a'll tell ye something, seein' as yer out of the runnin'. The fact is "—he laughed quaveringly—"I had what ye might call stray thoughts about Miry mysel', at dead o' night, like King David tryin' to count his sins. Ye'll have heard o' King David—an awfae hand among the lasses, by all accounts. Well, we'll no' ca' him names for that. It's a kind o' failin' that good men are fashed wi'. Ah, man, if ye only understood Scotch, I'd sing ye what Robbie—that's Burns, ye ken—says on the point:

Gie me a cannie hour at e'en,
My arms about my dearie, O;
An' war'ly cares an' war'ly men
May a' gae tapsalteerie, O!

There, man, isn't it grand? But, och, I forgot it's Greek to you."

"Can't make nothin' o' that bloomin' lingo," Pickens remarked, not without a distinct suggestion of contempt.

"No, God help ye," rejoined the Glasgow man compassionately ; "and it's a great drawback. But never mind. What I was goin' to say is that I widna for the world dream o' ploughin' wi' your heifer, d'ye understand? Live and let live, that's my motto. If a man has a lass, let him keep her, so long as both's fain. There's plenty more, and no one can

complain that the feck o' them's no' willin'. And the short and the long of it is that, the coast bein' clear and the weather fine, as ye might say, I had a notion o' puttin' the speak on Miry. Ye need sea room to manœuvre a prize like Miry."

Pickens laughed lightly, but his heart was an automatic drum.

"Ain't got the courage to ask 'ow she'd like 'Awkins for 'er other name, eh?" he said.

"In a kind of a daffin way I've tried to find out," returned the Glasgow man. "But you're never sure o' Miry. Whiles she's just meltin' butter, and then afore ye know she's as cuttin' as an east wind. Once I took her to Hampstead Heath, and paid my hardwon siller for rides on the merry-go-rounds! Well, as we whirled on their daft cock-horses, dod, man, I thought I had her, for she leaned over to me, just as if she was ready to fa' in my arms. I could have kissed her, but for very fear, and 'Dave,' says she, 'ain't this just—you know wot?' I was near droppin' off wi' pure dizziness o' joy; but when it was all over, and I was for sayin' the word, she just up and laughed at me."

There was a tense pause, and then Pickens asked:

"Didn't she say nothin'?"

"Oh! yes, she said plenty, said for one thing that I was a great deal bigger goose than she thought to take to merry-go-rounds for my coortin'. And it's expensive—far too expensive when nothing comes of it."

Pickens snickered.

"And where do I come in?" he asked abruptly.

"I was to bring ye to the Scotch mission," was the answer; "and here's the place. A'm sayin' ye'll not be lettin' on what I've told ye."

"I ain't given to peachin', matey," returned Pickens. "Keep yer mind easy."

The next minute, contrary to a fixed resolution (made because of Sal), Pickens strode into the Scots mission, in an ardour which gave his companion a secret twinge where his feeling was tenderest. They had the good luck to find Miry there, in a great bustle of affairs, and eagerly glad to see them both.

"I'll just tell 'e wot I want, Chawley," she said with characteristic promptitude, and ran over the plan of action, giving her orders as she went.

The occasion was to be the making of a great feast by Mr. Briscoe Bunting, a real Lord Mayor's banquet, minus the preliminary circus, the spangles, the flunkeys, the fanfare, and the torpid harangues. But being an American and original, Mr. Bunting insisted on the frolic of first making a series of calls on the more distinguished of the prospective guests. How to accomplish this was a puzzle. Mr. Emmet was not at hand to advise; Mr. Dalrymple shrank from the peril of aiding. He wanted the feast; never was feast so much wanted, but never was danger more obvious. It was one thing to go forth with the zeal of a Crusader; it was quite another to return alive and unmaimed.

In this dilemma Miry was consulted, and instantly named Pickens as the only person within the circle of her acquaintance in the least competent to introduce Mr. Bunting as he desired. "Better'n ten 'tecs," she affirmed, with the assurance of perfect knowledge.

Mr. Dalrymple gathered his brows doubtfully. Before Miry he was dumb, but privately he gave a candid character-sketch of Pickens, only to find each dissuasive stroke an added incitement.

"Can you trust the girl?" Mr. Bunting asked.

"Can you trust a woman afire and on her mettle?" was the response.

"That's all right," remarked B. B. in his light, casual way. "I guess she knows her man; and, anyway, this thing's got to go through."

So they awaited Pickens's return from the country, hoping he would not tarry nor be retarded by legal difficulties.

"Rummy," was his smirking comment, when at last the proposition was laid before him; "but if Miry's in it, I reckon it's all right."

"Miry goes too—that's one of the conditions," answered Mr. Bunting.

Two days later, with Miry and Pickens for guides, he set forth on yet another expedition of discovery, this time to regions wherein the stoutest intruder goes at his peril, and even a thrice-armed authority proceeds with the extremity of caution.

CHAPTER XXXV

B. B. TOUCHES BOTTOM

BEGINNING where Mr. Dalrymple ended, they dived straight into the depths where a cast-off, submerged humanity devotes a preternatural talent to the baffling of the law, where systemised oppression goads misery into crime, where evil passes from the casual resource of the desperate to a usage and fixed mode, the only usage, the only fixed mode, and human life (were the truth owned) is reckoned more lightly than the life of cat or dog. Being cramped in language, men loosely call this city within a city, this belt within a belt a slum ; it is in reality an abysmal sore that ferments and cankers, eating deeper and ever deeper into surrounding substance like a seven-fold cancer. One thing only makes it tolerable to the world, that as yet it is well hidden in the rear of the things in general, and therefore not offensive to the self-attentive throng in the highways of business and pleasure.

Into this nether Inferno the guides took the latter-day prose Dante, not in imagination only. The

exploit had unimagined hazards, as even Pickens was in fairness compelled to hint. But a rare nerve is developed in the sparkling champagne atmosphere of America. B. B. set out as coolly as if to take the air among fellow millionaires in his own delightful Central Park. And it was well, for he was to need all his nerve and all his coolness.

The early sensations, however, were such as come of the disagreeable rather than the perilous. Though priding himself on a tried ability to take the world as he found it, he nevertheless disclosed the novice in the frequency with which his handkerchief was at his nostrils in a vain endeavour to exclude fumes. Miry and Pickens laughed slyly as an experimenting chemist might laugh at the affliction of a new pupil. They remarked encouragingly he would presently get over these qualms of daintiness; nor were they wrong, for within an hour he had forgotten the quality of the atmosphere in the excitement of the quest, and the singular novelty of the study.

Twice at least within twenty-four hours Mr. Bunting fancied the time was come for his executors to take over his affairs. The first occasion was when on stumbling of a sudden from darkness into a dazzle of light, a door was fiercely banged behind him, and there rose from a group of startled black-bearded men a growl as of beasts of prey for blood. The situation was plain even to his bewildered senses. He had blundered into a coiners' den, and for one instant the thought of the penalty froze him. At

the same time he wondered whether Pickens had betrayed him, but the suspicion was dissipated almost before the alarmed brain could register the unworthy idea.

"It's all right, mates," Pickens called, stepping forward with a hand uplifted for peace. "It's all right. Don't lose yer 'eads. Gennleman's a friend of mine."

It fell to Miry, however, woman-like, to avert murder. A black-headed Pole, glaring with the ferocity of a hyena through hair and grease, had slipped from his place and lunged at Mr. Bunting in summary vengeance for the intrusion. With the instant skill of one trained to broils, she struck up the hand that held the knife, in the same moment, as it appeared, locking her arms about the intending assassin. It was the embrace of a roused she-bear.

"Wot yer makin' a row about?" she demanded, swinging him back. "Don't 'e see, ye bloomin' furriner, as we're friends?"

The light went down as she thrust him from her (his knife rattling to the floor), but Pickens promptly turned it up again.

"Mates, no hokey-pokey," he said; whereupon one who distrusted everything British, except British gullibility, cried out, "Judas."

Miry's eyes flashed dangerously.

"Chawley," she said through set teeth, "I'll 'elp ye to lick the lot as is mean enough to think we ain't actin' on the straight."

"Ye 'ear," said Pickens, drawing himself up; and then changing to the tone of the peacemaker: "Gennlemen, gennlemen, think wot yer a-doin' of. Don't forget as two sides can play with knives, though one side mightn't think it worth while ter be callin' names. I ain't begun to answer to the name of Judas yet. Wot's more to the pint at present is this, that leavin' Miry an' me out'n account, my friend there," jerking his head at B. B. without moving his eyes, "'as at this minit where 'e stands afore 'e two revolvers, six chambers each, latest American make, an' every blessed one of 'em loaded: enough for the whole lot in case of trouble, I reckon. But ye don't want no shootin', do 'e, sir, if it can be done without?"

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Bunting, opening his eyes a little at this information about revolvers.

"There 'e are," said Pickens benevolently. "Though 'e's American an' used to shootin', 'e don't want no row. Law! wot a joke, lookin' in friendly's ole pals an' pewter pots to be received with knives—knives," repeated Mr. Pickens in a voice calculated to make any man who attempted to use a knife criminally for ever ashamed of himself. "Pretty reception, ain't it? I 'low as I oughter given warnin' p'r'aps. 'Knock an' ring,' says you. Quite right too. Only, 'avin' nothin' but good hintentions in 'ere," he slapped his breast to prove its genuineness, "I forgot as we mightn't be welcome. S'elp me Bob. Let me interjuce my friend."

Tact, urbanity, and the distribution of gold as a token of good faith did the rest, and Mr. Bunting, judiciously blind to what he saw, was allowed to go unscathed.

In the second instance even Pickens walked less confidently. Leaving his friends in an alley outside, he first made investigations alone. Miry's whispered judgment was that Chawley was taking them into "'ot spots." Presently he returned to lead them through the darkness of tortuous passages and many stairs to a room hardly bigger than a cupboard, lighted by a single candle set in an empty beer bottle, and almost devoid of furniture. There he left them again, and stayed so long away that Miry went in search of him. She came back with a very grave face, walked without a word to the window, and peered into the blackness of a yard beneath. Disquieted by her manner, Mr. Bunting asked what she was looking at. Her answer was to inquire, in a whisper, whether in case of necessity he thought he could jump from the window. He rejoined lightly that in his opinion it is always possible to jump from a window, the only point in doubt being the effect on reaching earth.

"Folks 'as done it 'fore now," said Miry, disregarding his frivolity, and then added impetuously that Chawley ought not to have risked them there at all. His response was that if she had either fear or scruple, they had better go, leaving Pickens to follow.

Miry laid a finger suggestively on her lips.

"Couldn't if we wanted to," she said, putting her mouth close to his ear. "There ain't a wall 'ere but 'as eyes an' ears, nor a door but 'as 'ands, and sometimes the 'ands 'as knives, 'eaps wuss'n that furriner's."

"Where are we, then?" he asked, unconsciously becoming low-voiced and furtive.

But before she could reply Pickens was back. He had had a tussle, he told them, but "it was all right"—conditionally. Blindfolded Mr. Bunting might advance, otherwise he had come far enough, and a little too far.

"There's sunthin' I want 'e pertikler to see, sir," Pickens said warmly. "But it ain't no go 'cept yer eyes is tied up gettin' there."

B. B. looked very straight and very searchingly into Chawley's face.

"Quite genuine?" he asked quietly.

"If ye've lost faith," returned Pickens, "say the word an' I'll conduck ye back same way's ye came."

Mr. Bunting apologised and presented his handkerchief to Miry. "Oblige me by doing the blindfolding," he said; and when the operation was done: "Thanks. Now, Pickens, your arm, if you please; we sink or swim together."

That was one of the proudest moments of Chawley's life, and Miry, too, had thrills of elation. Mr. Bunting's feelings were more complicated. He was going with sealed eyes into unknown perils. He

no longer doubted his guide, but he doubted most other things, and the doubting mood does not conduce to peace of mind. As they passed along he was conscious of many mysterious, half-audible noises, whisperings, rustlings, stealthy goings to and fro, and he knew that hostile eyes were upon him. Presently Miry suggested that the bandage be taken off, but a rough voice answered gruffly, "Not yet." The captive was led down a flight of stairs, along a passage, and down further stairs much shorter than the first. At the bottom of that second flight the handkerchief was removed, and Mr. Bunting, like a prisoner unbound, looked about him.

They were in a vaulted passage that smelled of dampness and decay, and was wholly unlighted save for the flickering candle held by a man who accompanied them at once as pilot and warder. He glanced sullenly at Mr. Bunting as the bandage came off, his malign expression emphasised by the pitted records of small-pox seen in dancing grotesque shadow, turned silently, and pushing open a door, stood aside to let the others pass in. Then he followed, carefully closing the door behind him. As Mr. Bunting looked round the tiny dank apartment, which was meagrely furnished as a bedroom, Pickens asked him softly if he heard anything. He listened intently. There was the faintest suggestion of a far-off hum, a great booming noise such as might send its dying echoes into the grave itself. But it merely intensified the silence, and the listener

was acutely aware of absolute separation from the world.

"I cannot say I hear anything," he answered.

Pickens looked towards the candle-bearer and held out his hand.

"Blazer, you open up an' I'll 'old the light," he said. "Mind lookin' the other way just arf a minit, sir? Thankee—there 'e are." Mr. Bunting wheeled back, and behold at his feet a yawning hole, black and sinister.

"Look in," said Pickens cheerily. "'Ear anything now?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Bunting, with an eerie sensation. I hear the lapping of water."

"Look closer, sir," said Pickens, holding the candle forward. "See anything?"

"Nothing, except a black gleam," was the answer.

"Ah!" cried Pickens, like one who reveals a wonder, "that's wot I wanted 'e to see. Look again, sir, if 'e don't mind."

"What is it?" Mr. Bunting asked, gazing like a fascinated child.

"Blazer, you tell 'im," said Pickens.

"It's wot we calls the Poppin' 'Ole," responded Blazer, out of the hoarsest throat that ever gave forth human breath.

"The Popping Hole," repeated Mr. Bunting, getting chill with horror. "What's the Popping Hole?"

"All Isle o' Wight?" said Blazer, with a meaning look at Pickens.

"All Isle o' Wight?" returned Pickens. "Go a'ead."

"Why, ye see," said Blazer in a husky cackle, turning to Mr. Bunting, "when drunk sailors miss port an' coves from the country loses 'emselves 'ere in London, they sometimes tikes this way 'ome."

Mr. Bunting looked from Blazer to Pickens, and from Pickens to Miry, whom he found standing against the wall with her eyes shut, as if closing out a sight she durst not behold.

"I don't understand," he said in bewilderment.

"I'll tell 'e outside, sir," Pickens responded, looking shrewdly into the pallid face. "The air in 'ere ain't just the most bracin' in the world. This way, sir." And he turned to go. With a creepy spine and a feeling of the scalp as if each individual hair rose in a grisly shudder, Mr. Bunting turned after him.

CHAPTER XXXVI

GOVERNMENT BY SATIRE

AT last they had touched bottom. The *vie intime* could go no lower than that gruesome hole over the black river which holds so many secrets. Unknown men went out there to the eternal sea, leaving neither relic nor word of farewell. A sister, a wife, a sweetheart, a father, a mother, a chum marvelled perhaps in midnight vigil or twilight reverie why somebody wrote no more, somebody who had promised in all the ardour of affection to send news of himself, somebody for whom the aching heart yearned. Then, as the weary years went in a long-drawn agony of love, the patient hope died like a burnt-out candle, and graves in green, far-off country places graciously ended the last acts of unexplained tragedies. Time, the inexorable effacer of all things mortal, passed hence yet more of its baffling mysteries against the final solution and revelation when there shall be no more riddles.

Mr. Bunting came forth quivering. The discovery that his enchanting civilisation concealed things

darker and worse than the mediæval dungeon and the crude engine of torture, thrilled him with horror and dismay. Was it true, then, that the faster the world progressed, the better the devil throve, and that he, Briscoe Bunting, capitalist at large, was partly responsible? Here was a question that must be answered; here was duty imperatively presenting her mandate as on a spear-point.

Miry was hardly less shocked, albeit her thoughts took a strictly personal turn. She had drawn back aghast, but more lively than her terror was the wonder how much the gallant Pickens knew of the hideous Popping Hole. Had he guilefully hidden an evil knowledge from her in the time when they talked confidingly together? She could forgive many sins, but not the keeping of such a secret. Luckily for her peace of mind and Chawley's reputation, a chance question from Mr. Bunting put her at ease.

"Ain't wot I oughter be by a long chalk," Pickens owned frankly. But as he was a sinful and honest man, he had neither part nor lot in the policy of the Popping Hole. Miry listened with an exquisite indifference, but the words were as cordial to a chilled heart and sunlight to troubled eyes.

Dissembling her gratification, she proposed abruptly they should get on with business. Mr. Bunting was likewise recovering his native taste for activity; and, indeed, once over the inevitable recoil of feeling, that black portal of the unknown perhaps

appeared less dreadful than parts of the way thither, as a gibbet may well be less frightful than what goes before. At the worst, the end is a complete release from life's indenture. The immitigable harrows will tear no more; the last thorn has drawn the last drop of blood from the lacerated foot; the sloughs of despond can no more betray or engulf.

In the eagerness of the first plunge into the depths Mr. Bunting hurried too much for nice observation, as a child breathlessly counts its Christmas toys before staying to consider style or quality. He had seen what the startled mind accepted as the worst, because it marked the nadir—the very bottom of the pit. On the return journey there was opportunity to modify that judgment, inasmuch as he was better able to mark the harrows at work, the pilgrim limping with wounded feet, and whole colonies weltering in the sloughs of despond, which are the back-wash and turbid vortices of a society devoted to window-dressing and front-door appearances.

Thanks to Miry, he penetrated domestic scenes which would have been forbidden even to Pickens. Thus he was allowed to peep in where father and mother, son and daughter-in-law, the girl in her teens and the lodger who may or may not be courting her, with a squad of children, perform the daily miracle of living, eating, sleeping, and much else besides in one small room, the room, too, as often happens, in which the family bread is earned in a constant battle with disease and death.

In one such instance he had the good fortune to catch the whole household at home, and counted eighteen members. Thrice he counted ere he could believe his own reckoning. Two beds, three chairs, a table that was also a work-bench, with a litter of damaged utensils, made up the furniture. Mentally he tried to figure how the eighteen slept, and gave up the attempt in despair. Omitting all question of decorum, he could not put a dozen and a half into two beds. That is a feat which necessity alone accomplishes. When he appealed to Miry for enlightenment, she answered that they "squeezed themselves anywhere anyhow." As the problem was still puzzling, she said more definitely, "Put five in a bed—four longways and one 'cross the foot—six kids below, three underneath each bed, and two on a rug in the middle of the floor, and 'ow many's left over?"

"Great heavens!" cried Mr. Bunting. "Is this civilised England? Are they never smothered?"

"Oh, yes," she replied. "Once in a while a kid's found dead in the morning."

"And what happens then?"

"Oh! there's a mess of a hinquest. The cor'nor 'e gives a lecture, an' the jury they tell wot they think, an' the kid's buried. That's 'bout all."

"And when disease gets in? When there's an epidemic?"

"Then," returned Miry, with decision, "pretty well the whole lot dies."

Mr. Bunting was beginning to understand the death rate of the slums.

"Mind once when six people died in two rooms, 'longside each other, in one day," Pickens put in almost with pride. "That was when I 'ad fever myself, an' not a bloomin' soul 'ud come near us, live or die, but the doctor an' the passon an' Miry 'ere that fetched jelly on the sly. Lor', wot a 'ead I 'ad on me!"

"Off yer nut that time all right, Chawley," remarked Miry. "Mind one night as you thought you was the blessed Prince of Wyles, an' talked 'bout Buckin'am Palice, an' the toffs, an' the cham an' chicken. Ye'd 'ave made an elephant larf."

"And you, Miry," said Mr. Bunting, "have you never had anything of the sort?"

"Me!" laughed Miry. "Bless 'e, I've 'ad my share of most things that's goin' round 'ere."

She named diphtheria, scarlet fever, measles, mumps, enteric, and chicken-pox as things which had at various times enlivened existence.

"Blind for a week once when I was a kid," she added.

"And you've survived it all," said Mr. Bunting admiringly. "The stuff must be first rate, Miry."

"Ain't good enough to die, I s'pose," rejoined Miry. "'Ad chances enough if I wanted to."

Mr. Bunting moved on thoughtfully. In slumdom the Darwinian principle out-heroded Herod in ruthlessness of slaughter. Only the hardiest of the

hardy could possibly survive infancy, and even the survivers issued from the early fray like shipwrecked mariners cast up by the black surge, not only battered and forlorn, but often pitiably maimed and marked for life.

After the congestion of eighteen inmates to a room, a dozen seemed as the easing of a virulent inflammation. To descend to the eights was like entering breezy open spaces, and a limit of four suggested positive sparseness of population. But the conditions were ever the same—a complete reversal of all that makes the world delightful to the rich man and the connoisseur. Everywhere Mr. Briscoe Bunting appeared to detect "the fog in the throat, the mist in the face," the convulsive, hopeless effort to live. He turned from doors rank with infection; he passed to and fro among the nameless multitude that toils dumbly and in hunger so that despots and dictators may fare sumptuously, and thinks less of rations than of some den of shelter; he looked on disabled age dying neglected in hidden lairs; he shrank from the pleading eyes of afflicted childhood, eyes that had the largeness and the fever-brightness of starvation. All his loose change was gone before he saw the last of them.

With the owner of one pair of eyes that regarded him with disquieting intensity, Miry remained behind, for there was creeping into them an expression which she, alas! understood too well.

"Not feelin' AI to-day, Peter'j'n," she remarked with feigned cheerfulness. "Like Miry to stay with you a little while, eh?"

He looked up with a haunting seriousness which Miry remembered long afterwards.

"Yes," he answered; "please stay. You're good. I like you."

But before sitting down beside him, as Peter'j'n requested, Miry slipped out and spent a shilling of the wages earned in the match factory. When she returned, Peter'j'n kissed her fervently, but his mother wept, Miry pretending not to see. Peter'j'n, however, openly exhorted to courage.

"Don't cry, mummy," he pleaded. "I ain't hungry any more, and sister ain't either. Just see her eating!"

Peter'j'n spoke more truly than he knew. He was not hungry any more, though he ate nothing. He was fast passing the stage of hunger.

The millionaire-student pondered these things in a deepening perplexity and astonishment. But the discovery which surprised him most of all came of a chance remark by Chris Heath. It was this, that many and many a time when there was neither bread in the cupboard nor fire in the grate, when the clothing was fluttering rags, and the furniture a vanished quantity, there was money in the purse. Never was heathen idol or Christian shrine guarded more anxiously than that treasure. Widows toiled fifteen hours a day to get it; fathers and mothers

went dinnerless to add to it, and children shoeless that it might be preserved ; babes famished, old bones shivered themselves into the grave, sickness and death entered, but that money remained inviolate. For it was the rent, it was for Meckles and his kind ; and Meckles and his kind were no more to be denied than a wolf with its fangs already in the prey. All other things might fail, but while flesh and blood could strive or endure, usury would have the uttermost farthing.

Yet another thing Mr. Bunting found equally amazing, to wit, that the worse the accommodation the higher proportionately the figure paid for it. Thus, in the deep of deeps, the region of the Popping Hole, where his innocence fancied the canaille would have leave to kennel free, rents were highest. The revelation that, foot for foot, the worst portions of the slums yielded a better rate of gain than the palaces of Park Lane or Fifth Avenue was astounding. He saw yet again, this time with discerning eyes, how expertly the birds of prey pick bones, how richly avarice reaps where it has not sown, and gathers where it has not strawed. At the same time, he was bewildered and dismayed by the raging incongruity of tragedy and farce ; orgies of mirth as of fever patients in delirium, madness of desperation, maniacal revelry, ribald laughter, moaning agony, and blatant infamy. It was as if the blare of festive trumpet mingled ceaselessly with the roll of muffled drum and the toll of passing bell. Had Aristophanes

come to reign and chosen his ministers for their accomplishment in the satire of government?

Feverish and abashed, the explorer returned to Mr. Dalrymple for explanation.

"Never saw such misery and demoralisation in my life," he said, "and couldn't have imagined it. What are the causes? Who are responsible?"

"The causes unfortunately are many and varied," Mr. Dalrymple answered, "and, broadly speaking, Christian England is responsible. Meanwhile, the sons of extortion are having it pretty much their own way."

"Upon my word, sir," Mr. Bunting cried, "one begins to fear the wrong people perished during that little episode in the Red Sea. Well, so far's I can make out, there's a pretty tragic game of chess going on just at present in your slums. How long is it to be tolerated?"

"Till there's an outbreak to teach men a little justice and humanity," replied Mr. Dalrymple with compressed lips.

"The volcano may erupt at any minute," said B. B. "That's in the course of nature when fires are banked too high, and an eruption might do good in spite of dust and ashes. The censorious talk of the abandoned wickedness of your slums. No doubt they are wicked; but I tell you candidly, sir, that if I were compelled to live as I have seen others living during the last few days, I'd be ten times more wicked than the worst of them. Wickedness! What

astonishes me is that there's one rag of respectability, one instinct of decency left."

Mr. Dalrymple bowed his head.

"I have ceased to be censorious," he returned quietly, "because I am not fit to judge fellow-sinners whose lines are so much harder than mine. When I think of the patience and fellow-feeling of our slum-dwellers, when I reflect how they are ground, goaded, and tempted, how their substance is wrung from them, and how little they retaliate, I am moved to thank God for the virtue inherent in man."

"I guess you don't catch them much at church," said B. B.

"You guess quite correctly," replied Mr. Dalrymple. "Of our working population, perhaps one in ninety ever darkens the door of church or chapel. In our slums the proportion is infinitesimal."

"Are you surprised, sir?" asked B. B.

"Sorry," was the response; "grieved beyond expression, depressed, almost broken-hearted many a time, but not surprised; before Heaven, not surprised."

He paused, his face twitching, and then added, the strong voice breaking as on a sob:

"Oh! Mr. Bunting, you cannot conceive what an awful thing it is to be placed as I am, striving with all my might, striving in utter futility, looking eagerly for one sign of blessing, and that sign withheld, pleading in anguish of heart, and getting no response, God hiding His face from His own servants. It is killing Emmet. It will kill me too."

As Mr. Bunting gazed into the troubled face of the foiled Viking, made, one would think, for broil and battle, he seemed to hear the old cry of agony and reproof: *Oh! Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.* With the terrible addition, "*Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*"

"I think we must be all wrong," Mr. Dalrymple pursued. "The ancient methods have lost their virtue. We are face to face with new conditions. Many a time I think I hear the devil laughing at us for our patching of old garments, our adhesion to dead systems. I tell you, we need a new Luther, a new Reformation. At present, every man's energy is consumed in counselling his neighbour what to do. We are like finger-posts pointing the way we never travel. In Heaven's name, let us descend from our pulpits, let us mingle with the people and understand their needs; let us feed, clothe, and lodge decently. Let us work, and not merely talk, and we shall at least have our feet in the right path. It is not preaching that is wanted, but doing."

"You are convinced of that?"

"As clearly as of my own existence."

Mr. Bunting turned abruptly to a rickety desk in the corner, wrote something on a slip of paper he took from his pocket, and turned back to Mr. Dalrymple.

"Let's make a start, then," he said, his eyes sparkling. "Accept the price of that race-horse as a beginning."

"You really mean it?" cried Mr. Dalrymple, looking from the figures on the cheque to the donor's face. This was beyond credence.

"I may not mean all I say," was the response; "but generally speaking I mean what I do."

A knock came to the door, and Constable O'Ryan peeped in.

"Beggin' yer pardon, sorr," said Tim, "but d'ye moind cockin' yer eye round the back av thim primisis? There's a frolic goin' on in the backyard that's agin the law, a'm feared. Good-night, sorr." And Tim vanished.

As the pair hurried to the rear, sounds of an altercation reached their ears. Mr. Dalrymple had no difficulty in recognising the voices.

"Thought it would come to this sooner or later," he remarked. "It seems you can't quite kill the old Adam."

In the dim light of the mission lamp Miry and Sal were settling private scores, with Pickens standing amiably by as umpire.

CHAPTER XXXVII

APOLLO AND THE NYMPHS

CHANCING to drop into the Cherry Tree after a foraging visit to St. Emmanuel Vicarage, Sal was piqued to a furious jealousy by tales of Chawley's galavanting with Miry in that cruise round eastern waters. At least a dozen sympathisers, fired by their evening tipple, impressed upon her as a thing beyond dispute that she ought not to "stand it," and triumphantly justified her in any action she might deem it necessary to take in vindication of her right and her honour. They deftly pointed the moral with accounts of their own prowess on similar occasions, and to say that the fur flew in the course of those piquant episodes is to put a hot matter coldly. A smaller number appeared to reflect on Sal's lack of spirit.

"Lor! ye ain't gettin' old, are 'e?" one asked in a thick cackle of derision.

"I'd 'ave 'er false 'air down if I was you," said another.

"An' do up 'er peepers for beef-steak pie," added a third.

Sal took off the last of her gin neat, and went forth flaming for battle. It was out of the question to think of upbraiding Chawley. Even in her cups Sal would not dream of that folly. Where men are possessions to be fought for tooth and claw, one must be prudent. Besides, in the precincts of Vernal Avenue the treasures have summary methods with domestic entanglements. On Chawley's temptress, therefore, must fall the vengeance, and justice could not deal too hardly with the abandoned thief who sneaked another woman's man.

"I'll spoil 'er beauty, see if I don't," Sal told herself viciously. "I'll mark 'er so pretty she won't know 'er own ugly phiz in the glass. Ugh! let me at 'er."

She thought of the disfiguring effects of vitriol, but vitriol costs money; and, after all, money would be better spent on gin.

Knowing that Miry was certain to visit the Scots mission, Sal lay in wait, and had the felicity to catch the culprit *flagrante delicto*—that is to say, in a well-planned ambush she beheld with her own shocked eyes the guilty pair approaching the rear of the mission, and her rival was laughing, laughing in triumph and happiness. Her nerves vibrated like fiddle-strings, the flabby muscles tightened with a jerk. Alas! time, drink, and the incidences of slum-life had unfitted Sal for open combat with a fighter of Miry's calibre. Wherefore she fell back on strategy. Drawing in her breath, she remained

motionless in the shadows, half crouching as for a spring. As her rival was lightly acknowledging Chawley's gallantry, she delivered her blow; and before recovery was possible, her hands were in the maddening black hair, which that day had been frizzed and done up with unusual care. The next instant Miry had recognised her assailant, and replied with a science which Pickens considered would have done credit to a man, and was trebly excellent in a woman.

"Oh! it's you, is it?" she said through clenched teeth. "It's pepperin' yer arter, eh? All right, since you insist, you shall 'ave it. Chawley, you see as we ain't disturbed."

Two minutes later Sal was clawing the air blindly and gurgling hysterically, half her raiment strewn on the ground. It was that panting gurgle which had reached the ear of Constable O'Ryan. He listened a moment, wondering whether it was red murder or mere fun, and deciding it might be a combination of both, apprised Mr. Dalrymple, as we have seen. He could not be arresting every petty disturber of the peace, for Mr. O'Ryan shared the opinion of his illustrious countryman, Edmund Burke, that the law must occasionally bear with the follies and depravities of mankind.

By the time Mr. Dalrymple and B. B. reached the scene of conflict the battle was fought and won. Miry had whipped up the coils of her fallen hair, and was pinning on her hat. Sal leaned against

the wall whimpering feeble oaths; and Pickens, his hands thrust to the uttermost depths of his pockets, grinned in jocular content. Not every Apollo is honoured by such gory contention of the nymphs at street corners. Besides, the victory was won in a style that would have gratified any lover of sport.

"It's all right, sir," Miry told Mr. Dalrymple, with a fiery toss of the head. "She's made a little mistake, that's all. Thought 'erself an A1 fightin' Bobs when she was only fit for 'orspital. 'Ere, you come along o' me," she added peremptorily, and led the unresisting Sal round a corner to water and a basin.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" moaned Sal, affecting an air of injured innocence, since fighting was of no avail.

"Cruel 'ard, ain't it?" Miry retorted scornfully. "Them things do 'appen when ye ain't careful. Now you wash an' tuck up just quick's ye know 'ow, 'cos Mr. Dalrymple says 'e can't 'ave no messin' round 'ere."

"My clothes!" whined Sal. "They're all tore off me; an' my 'ead—oh, my poor 'ead!"

Miry wheeled, swept up the strewn fragments of clothing, and flung them at the owner.

"There's yer blessed clothes," she said grimly; "an' don't you waste time makin' a row 'bout yer 'ead, or I shall be 'bliged to wash 'e down myself, an' it won't be no soft scrubbin'-brush I'll use neither."

For one dizzy second Sal's arteries drummed for reprisal. But the next the impulse died impotently.

Miry was young and in form, Chawley was indifferent, and the world was monstrously unjust to a poor woman contending for her own.

Pickens gave B. B. a racy account of the fray, while Mr. Dalrymple and Miry retired some paces for private conference. The minister was disposed to expostulate.

"I put it straight to you, sir," Miry returned with a flash of the eye. "If someone was to 'it you out'n the dark when you wasn't expectin' to be 'it, wot would you do? If I knows anythink, 'it back. Well, that's exackly wot I done, an' there's the consekince." She pointed a finger of contempt at the place where Sal was tearfully doing her toilet. "'Er a-weepin' an' a-goin' on as if she was a blessed saint an' me a bloomin' sinner, all for wot? 'Cos I gave 'er a taste of 'er own sauce."

"But you may have given it a little too forcibly, Miry," Mr. Dalrymple suggested.

"Don't you be takin' on 'bout that, sir," Miry responded warmly. "If she ain't got a good deal less'n she deserves, I ain't no judge. She'll come round, never you fear."

"But you haven't told me what it was all about," he said in a tone of perplexity.

"Didn't take time to explain 'er reasons," Miry returned, her face suddenly flushing. "But since you ask me, I'll tell 'e straight wot I think. I think it was 'bout a man."

"Fighting about a man," said Mr. Dalrymple

reproachfully. "Oh, Miry, Miry!" He was nearly adding, "And what a man!" but refrained, from regard for Miry's feelings.

"Women does that sometimes," Miry rejoined, flushing yet more deeply. "More fools they, seein' the thanks they get as a rule. 'Pears to me a man ain't just the sort of feather a woman can wear in 'er 'at with any comfort. Gawd alone knows why we fight for 'em. But I needn't 'ave troubled fightin' 'er"—inclining a disdainful head towards the vanquished Sal—"an' she knows it jolly well."

Mr. Dalrymple also knew it; wherefore he seized the occasion to speak a word in season touching the treatment of the weak, the erring, and the defeatured by the young, the strong, and the good-looking.

"If 'e don't mind, sir, ye needn't bother 'bout the good looks," Miry replied. "They ain't of any consekince."

"Leave me to judge of that, please," was the rejoinder, which secretly pleased Miry, "and you just show your mettle by being kind to Sal and so heaping coals of fire on her head."

Miry laughed at his innocence.

"She won't feel them sort of coals," was the answer. "Ye'd need real live 'uns to make 'er squirm."

Miry was still in the dark over the Christian precept of returning good for evil, particularly where the exasperating Sal was concerned. Nevertheless, when Mr. Dalrymple asked her as a favour to himself to

take charge of the defeated woman, she sank her resentment, and undertook to conduct the derelict to a lodging for the night.

"Take me to the passon," Sal pleaded in all the meekness of humiliation.

"Wot passon?" Miry demanded. "Mr. Dalrymple 'ere? 'E can't accommodate ye 'cept 'e turns out'n 'is own bed. 'E ain't likely to share it with you, I don't think."

"Not 'im," cried Sal. "Not 'im—t'other 'un."

"St. Patrick?" queried Miry.

"That's 'im," replied Sal quickly. "That's 'im—St. Patrick. More room, more grub. Oh, the blessed little saint, 'e's an angel, 'e is!"

"Expect to meet 'im above the bright blue sky, don't 'e?" retorted Miry.

Sal laughed hoarsely. The idea was new and amusing.

"Must 'ave yer joke," she remarked, in a valiant attempt to be genial.

"Shockin' bad taste, ain't it?" rejoined Miry tartly. "Now you just be good enough to buck up; there ain't any time for 'angin' round. Step out, that's the word at present. Sticks ready to set up 'ousekeepin' again, I s'pose?"

Sal clucked curiously. Miry thought she was choking, but she was laughing—a little wryly on the wrong side of her mouth.

"Listen," she said, with sudden eagerness. "'Ow was I to live? Tell me, 'ow was I to live?"

"Spongin', I should think," replied Miry remorselessly.

"Oh, law!" cried Sal, as shocked as any fine lady at the idea. "If I didn't know you was a-jokin', I should think you was unkind, I should indeed."

"Mighty fond of jokin', ain't I?" responded Miry with a snort. "'Ad a lovely joke a little while ago when you met me so warm-'earted out'n the dark. But wot 'bout the sticks?"

Sal bent close and whispered something that made Miry's eyes twinkle.

"Put 'em up the spout, eh?" she said, as one who feels that an enemy is committed.

"'Ad to, m'dear," whined Sal. "No 'ome, no grub, no nothin'."

"Does Chawley know?" Miry inquired. Her voice was even and quiet, but her heart was leaping. Sal was trembling violently.

"'E's bin away," she quavered—"deserted me. Didn't know where 'e was more'n you, s'elp me Bob."

"Poor innercint, wot a bloomin' shame!" said Miry in piercing irony. "Clearin' out without explainin' where 'e was goin'. You don't know wot 'e's bin doin' or who 'e may 'ave bin takin' up along of. An' to leave ye without'n 'ome or grub, an' no loose change for the pub! See wot it is to be puttin' yer trust in man. Go on, please."

Sal was torn between a vehement desire to claw out Miry's eyes and the urgent need to conciliate.

As need is greater than desire, she withheld her itching fingers.

"Ye won't tell 'im," she implored. "Oh, m'dear, say as ye won't tell 'im."

In her mind's eye, Miry saw Pickens administering correction to Sal, and the vision was by no means unpleasant.

"Oh, m'dear, ye needn't be so jolly 'fectionit!" she returned. "S'pose I do?"

She had Sal on a hook, and took an angler's delight in playing the victim.

"Oh, my Gawd!" cried Sal, clutching her brows.

"Ye needn't trouble gettin' up 'ighsterics," Miry remarked calmly. "If ye make a bother, I'll 'and 'e over to a copper. 'E'll cure ye."

In throes of fear and passion Sal protested that nothing was further from her intention than to make a fuss or give any trouble.

"But ye won't tell Chawley," she implored afresh. "Say as ye won't tell 'im."

But Miry chose to let the Damocles' sword hang.

"'Ere's St. Emmanuel," she said curtly. "St. Patrick ain't at 'ome; but somebody'll look arter 'e."

She rang a back-door bell, lifted the latch, pushed Sal in, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CONCERNING THE GREAT FEAST

RETURNING hot-foot to the Scots mission she found her three friends in a burning enthusiasm. The great scheme of benevolence had come to a head. B. B., like a benignant Cæsar, came, saw and resolved to give Alsatia an astounding surprise. A banqueting hall was already chosen. Already, too, Pickens was constituted an advisory committee to deal with the invitations, and Miry had but to be asked to throw herself, as it were, headlong into the work of detail.

Caliban was to be bidden in all his disreputable grime, and he was to be invited to come in force. In Mr. Emmet's enforced absence Mr. Dalrymple undertook the duties of superintendent, with Pickens and Miry as first assistants. Miry was to be responsible for the ladies ; Chawley would be accountable for the gentlemen. B. B. made the two conditions, both Scriptural. First, that the invitations should go with particular heartiness to the maimed, the foiled, the miserable, the unfortunate

in life's fray, such as daily echoed in their hearts the old sad song,

I hear no music, I find no feast,
I slay no beast from a bounding steed;
I bestow no gold, I am poor and old,
I am sick and cold, without wine or mead.

Second, that inasmuch as love and charity differ from a "society function" and a criminal assize, no man's past was to be reckoned against him. Alike those fit for blessing and those fit for banning were to be allowed to mingle in relaxation and gladness, even as they were compelled to mingle in the strife for daily bread. If the cut of a man's hair suggested a recent period of seclusion the fact was not to debar him; if his biography were set forth at length in the black books of Scotland Yard he was nevertheless to receive the right hand of fellowship. Similarly, though a woman were known to have violated the entire Decalogue, and trampled the nobility of womanhood, she was to be welcome, if she came sober.

"God help us, it's repentance we all need," remarked B. B. quietly, "and sympathy makes for penitence. Among the daughters of men there are few whose history touches me more than that of Mary Magdalene."

"'Oo was she, sir?" Pickens asked.

"A good woman, Chawley, and that's enough," Miry answered promptly, and Chawley accepted the judgment without question.

Above all, fathers and mothers were to come with

their children, for the delight of childhood was the joy of Briscoe Bunting; young men and maidens were likewise to come, and the waifs and the strays should turn in from the streets that are

> Paven with perils, teeming with mischance,

for an hour's warmth and innocent festivity. The assembly, in a word, should be a microcosm of the East End, with the oppressor of all kinds eliminated.

At the end of the final conference Miry took Pickens aside, and spoke to him briefly but pointedly on a matter of honour.

"Ye understand wot this means, Chawley?" she asked.

"Jolly blow out, I reckon," Chawley answered with a grin.

"That an' sunthin' more," rejoined Miry. "It means 'do as ye like,' an' 'do as ye like' means there ain't to be no sneakin' or bad conduck, don't it?"

"Course it does," assented Pickens warmly.

"Very well, then," said Miry. "The woman as don't know 'ow to behave 'erself like a lidy shall do the 'rogue's march' in double quick time if I've two 'ands left on me, an', Chawley, you'll look arter the men?"

"You bet," cried Chawley joyously. "The bloke as tries it on out'n time shall 'ave this right enough," and he playfully held up a doubled fist.

"Thanks," Miry returned demurely. "That's all I wanted to say."

When the arrangements were complete Mr. Pickens,

by grace of the landlord, met a company of his friends in an upper room of the Cherry Tree, where he addressed them for all the world as if he were a party statesman making his will known to a conclave of his minions. He began with a lightning character-sketch of Mr. Briscoe Bunting, which that gentleman might be proud to have inscribed on his tombstone. B. B., it appeared, was a man whom even the fastidious and exclusive Pickens was not in the least afraid or ashamed to call "brother." He had, indeed, the ill-luck to be born rich. That he obviously could not help any more than they could help being born poor—on the whole a yet greater piece of ill-luck. But he was making amends, they knew how.

"Ain't that the right sort of cove?" asked Mr. Pickens, in blithe assurance of the answer. "'E don't put on no airs, though 'e could buy most of the toffs goin' round out'n 'is loose change, an' forget as 'e'd done it. Don't think you an' me's dirt under 'is feet, or that 'e sails round with the world in 'is inside pocket—excloosively for 'is own use. That's wot I like 'bout 'im, no gammin or bounce more'n 'e was the orneriest bloke alive. As to this bally blow out that 'e insists on givin', why, it's to be turn an' tuck in for all yer wuth, a sort of go as ye please an' do as ye like job, nobody arskin' wot yer a-doing' of; not a copper or a 'tec on dooty in the whole bloomin' show—more grub'n ye can eat, music an' dancin', an' silver spoons and general plate lyin' round permiskus. Think of that."

Changing his tone and manner, he pointed out how this unheard-of trustfulness and liberality put guests upon their honour. To be trusted, he remarked, is to be tested. A slip, a failure, a petty meanness under trust is doubly disgraceful, and may be doubly disastrous.

"Ye've got to think of yer repitation," said Pickens impressively. "Ye've got to remember that in things of this sort it pays best to act on the square. A man's got to say to 'imself, 'If I take one chance that ain't fair I may lose ten better chances arterwards when nobody's a-trustin' me.' Many a man," added Mr. Pickens, "is ruined for life by bein' too jolly smart at the wrong time."

He emphasised the profound truth that there are occasions when honesty is without doubt the best policy, delicately hinting that like the countryman of John Knox, he had tried both ways. The company roared, and Pickens beamed like a philosopher. A shrewd tactician, he reserved the hammer stroke for the end. The man who could not practise a professional abstinence for one short evening should from the instant of discovery forfeit the friendship of Charles Pickens.

There was a momentary hush of surprise, followed by looks of inquiry from face to face; then with one impulse the hearers sprang to their feet. They toasted Chawley, they sang in joyous discordancy "For he's a jolly good fellow," with one voice they shouted for honour. In the fever of enthusiasm

some of the younger spirits even dared to smite the lion jovially on the back, vowing he was a trump.

"It's a bargin, gennlemen?" Mr. Pickens inquired radiantly, and the response was such as a king might have envied and Pickens jocosely accepted as an appropriate tribute to leadership. On the great night a processional torrent of two thousand eager, jostling people, men, women, and children, streamed to prove the hospitality of B. B., and were enchanted with the proof. For the fare was the best procurable, by a caterer whose only instructions were to exclude strong drink and never think of cost. There were mighty joints, juicy and fragrant, that renewed the flavour of ancient festivals when England gaily roasted oxen whole and merited the epithet merry, smoking saddles of mutton, game and poultry in perplexing variety, savoursome sausages floating in gigantic dishes of gravy, deliciously scented pies, fish of the sea, fruit of the tropics, with a retinue of delicacies and kickshaws (the pride of cook and confectioner) fit to give half Alsatia nightmare.

Nor was the patronage less delightful than the fare. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy shone beneficently on the gathering in the care of Sir Sydney Dormer, and Rachel in the care of Mrs. Cadwallader Roy. Mr. Herstein, being unfortunately detained elsewhere, spent the evening revolving divers unsuspected thoughts and schemes. Potts, however, was present, despite previous experience; Asaph stood like a brother by his compatriot, and Mr. Emmet came

expressly from the country, worn and pale, but happy, exceedingly happy, because so many of his black sheep were enjoying a brief hour in Paradise.

After the strenuous eating the strains of jollity. To furnish ample music Pickens had himself engaged an orchestra of several flutes and fifes, half a dozen concertinas, trombone and clarionet, a string band, and a company of hand-bell ringers, with three up-to-date hurdy-gurdies, for reserve in case of stress. The ubiquitous mouth-organ was omitted as too common. Home-made niggers sang plantation songs, bandied execrable jests, and beat time on the bones. Punch walloped Judy like a man and a husband to the stimulus of uproarious applause. In a ravished silence Chawley warbled like a copseful of birds on a spring morning, and then gracefully introduced his friend, the celebrity of the "Skilly and Plank-bed," who tickled the knowing ones and curdled the blood of the novices. With "The Wearin' o' the Grane" Timothy O'Ryan moved sundry feminine compatriots to tearful outbursts of joy, and an irresistible desire to embrace the singer.

"Faith, me jewels, an' 'twill be the wearin' av nothin' at all if yez ketch me in that frame av moind," Tim observed, *sotto voce*, slipping modestly behind the scenes. Some, remembering old times, called for St. Patrick and "Eileen Aroon"; but Mr. Emmet had to shake his head, and those near by fancied there was a moist gleam in the weary eyes.

Mr. Dalrymple took his place and brought the

sensation of the evening. As he stepped to the front of the platform from the midst of the quality Miry suddenly dropped a burning face, but Chawley sat up with craned neck and a look of supreme beatitude. An expression of peculiar interest and intelligence also lighted the countenances of one or two "pals" by his side. The stir fell to an expectant hush, as if by instinct the assembly divined that something extraordinary was coming. Then at a reference to Mr. Bunting's generosity came a tumult of shouting, which increased tempestuously as B. B. was seen to be protesting. A similar exuberance of appreciation overwhelmed the ladies; and then all at once, as by a turn on a pivot, the attention was concentrated on Potts. He had laid aside important business to be with them, cherishing no grudge, in spite of experiences that need not be specified. Would he in return accept a token at once of their regard and their sense of justice? and suiting the action to the word, Mr. Dalrymple handed the amazed Potts his lost watch. Pickens led the applause, while the recipient of the gift first stared at the watch as at a thing returned from the dead, then at Mr. Dalrymple, and then at the audience.

"Speech, guv'nor," shouted Pickens, and the demand was repeated by a thousand tongues. In response Potts avowed he was no orator, yet he managed to speak very much to the point.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he remarked, "as my face probably informs you, I am equally amazed

and delighted. By an accident beyond my control, I lost my watch during a recent visit to this interesting district. Your kindness has restored it without scratch or blemish. Let me tell you I prize it a thousand times more than its cash value. My mother gave it; she's now where we all hope to go, and you'll understand my feelings. (Murmurs of sympathetic emotion.) We hear at times of the duty of rewarding virtue. I don't take much stock in that kind of thing. The virtue that needs reward to keep it going isn't much to lean on in time of trouble. ('Ear, 'ear, in chorus.) But, with your approval, I will ask Mr. Dalrymple to accept £50 from me, to be divided as his judgment may decide, among those to whom I owe this kindness. Ladies and gentlemen, you have done so handsomely by me that I hope we may have closer relations in the future."

In the storm of dust and noise that followed all were in deep bliss, but the happiest was Pickens, for he had beaten Scotland Yard at its own game, on his own ground. How he did it was a secret he chose to keep to himself.

When Potts had repocketed his watch the joyous stir began again with a lottery which was no lottery, inasmuch as it was all prizes and no blanks. A beneficent wizard waved a magic wand, and lo! the gates of toyland flew open to a burst of excited treble voices. Never had such a concourse of delights dazzled the eyes and electrified the hearts of tattered childhood. Farmyards, with stock of

cattle and fowls complete, the latter mostly in gay tropical plumage, alternated bewilderingly with Noah's arks, bearing huge menageries of wild and tame beasts. Regiments of soldiers, horse and foot, jostled turreted ships of war bristling with guns; steam-engines raced electric motors at terrific speed, causing frightful accidents and riotous fun. Flaxen-haired dolls were strewn in all the absurdity of their kind among kaleidoscopes, humming tops, flashing swords, muskets, and helmets. Lions, tigers, bears, and elephants fraternised with dogs and cats, monkeys and kangaroos. Bran pies yielded up their mysteries to little fingers aquiver with gladness, and to crown all representatives of outlandish peoples—Hindoos, Chinese, Turks, Bashi-Bazouks, Greenlanders, South Sea Islanders—mingled like maskers at a Christmas revel. In all its history the great hall had never before contained so many eager, bright young faces.

"Does one good to see them," Mrs. Cadwallader Roy remarked to Mr. Bunting. "B. B., I congratulate you."

"And I thank you," he returned, "for inducing me to stay. Yes, it does one's heart good."

One bright, excited face, alas, was missing. Peter'j'n was not there, though for a whole week he had gone to sleep dreaming of the wonderful event which was to transform life at a stroke. Many times a day he pictured to his little sister the joys that were in store for them. When hunger pinched he would hearten her with the assurance, "Never you

mind, baby, you'll get lots and lots to eat at the big party." Similarly, when she cried with cold he dilated on the warmth of the big party. The big party was to work miracles, and bring a glee to them all, daddy, mummy, and sister, which Peter'j'n, finding language feeble, was obliged to express with fervent clapping of hands. Poor little Peter'j'n, a mite against the arrayed forces of the universe! The proverb concerning the best laid schemes and the fondest hopes is as trite as everyday truth, as birth and death and striving and discomfiture, but to the individual the fact is an ever fresh bitterness. Peter'j'n cried a little when Dr. Jopling said, with a lump in the throat, that he had better not go to the much anticipated feast. But when he saw his mother's tears he instantly dried his own, telling her he was just in fun, and really and truly didn't care about feasts, which would only make his head ache worse. She would go herself, and he would be quite happy with daddy and sister, only she wouldn't stay long, lest he should weary; and she would bring back presents. So Chris went alone, stayed a short unhappy while, and stole back to her cellar, carrying a parcel made up by Mr. Bunting and Miry. An hour or so later Miry followed to Vernal Avenue, but immediately returned to the hall and took Mr. Dalrymple aside.

"If you please, sir," she said, "Peter'j'n's askin' for ye pertickler;" and for the first time he saw tears in her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXIX

HOPE, DISAPPOINTMENT, AND GRATIFICATION

WHEN the swain of Alsatia feels the mystic throb in his breast he oftentimes smites the angel of his choice with a clenched fist, and she, knowing his manly custom, takes the blow as a token of dawning affection, though she may retort haughtily, "Now, then, silly 'un, wot yer a-givin' us?" There were lovers at B. B.'s festival whose romance was conducted on that cogent principle of condescension and acceptance. There were others who bowed the knee and blushed shyly when the little god tickled. These, as it happened, departed together in a close carriage, a lilt of wedding bells chiming deliciously in their hearts. Not to trifle, the thing which had lately made Rachell thrill and brood alternately came suddenly to a head, and at her father's door she stepped out of the carriage almost beside herself with an exquisite fear and joy as of a spirit trembling doubtfully at the very gate of heaven. Like a practical, straight-going American, Asaph pleaded to be allowed there and then to interview Mr. Herstein.

But Rachel answered in a glowing confusion, "Not yet, not yet. Wait a little," as if one must take breath after gulping nectar.

She ran into the house in a dizzying tumult of emotion, yet withal perfectly clear in the conviction that she, and she alone, must take her father in hand. There were things which Asaph, for all his cleverness, did not and could not understand. Going up the great stair she panted, her heart chanting in giddy rapture, "Oh! Asaph, Asaph, can it be true, can it really be true?" At the top she paused as in a sudden terror. "A Christian," her awe-struck conscience whispered. "A Gentile," and she recalled the fierce, deep-seated scorn of her father for the whole hated tribe. A moment she stood to gather courage, then holding her breath as in the crisis of a charge, she ran to her father in the library. She had promised the importunate Asaph not to delay, and her own heart urged her to be instant and brave. If her father objected, if he frowned and grew angry, calling up against her the traditions and tenets of his people, she would close his mouth with caresses, overwhelm him with the unanswerable logic of the affections. What were traditions and tenets to her? What had she to do with the folly of race-hatred that ought to have been obliterated ages ago?

She found her father at his writing-table, his face set and hard with business. His expression relaxed as he greeted her, for that face which could look cruelly on others was never turned on her save in

affection. Nevertheless a shivering chill congealed the ardent feelings. Her swift intelligence divined that the moment was inopportune, that tender confidences were impossible. Very perfunctorily, as she thought, he asked how the "affair went off," who were there, and what was done. Then remarking she must be tired, sent her off to bed.

"And you, father?" she asked. "Aren't you going?"

"Presently," he answered. "Presently. Only I have one or two matters to settle first."

A strange impulse came upon her, and she kissed him with passionate tenderness, the tenderness which is more than half pity, in which a kind of contrition is mingled with love. He watched her as she turned hastily and went out, diffusing a subtle fragrance. How beautiful, how graceful she was! Could his dead Rachel see their child would the sight not make her glad even in the realms of death? His beloved! Well! all was for her, all—all, so that she might trample the scum under her feet.

The next minute the old set expression had returned to his face, the expression of vital intense thought. And in truth Mr. Herstein was thinking with the keenness and force of the man who has long generations of thinkers behind him. Or ever the Briton appeared in his daubs of war-paint, Mr. Herstein's progenitors were thinking profoundly, planning and executing magnificently. Ay, and they transmitted that power of thought as the most precious of

legacies, for after the spoiler has spoiled and the destroyer has destroyed, that magician, the brain, will build new palaces, add barn to barn, and fill them all; nay, will conquer the conqueror and make him pay tribute. As all things originated in the Divine Idea, so an idea is still the alchemist that transmutes the world to gold. It had brought Mr. Herstein to the shining heights where the air turns weak heads. He was not intoxicated, only breathing a profound gratification: for the hour, the sweet hour he had forecast, was dawning brilliantly.

In a long close interview with his lieutenant that evening he had hinted cautiously at the possibility of a change in their relations, and with a startled look Meckles immediately asked, "Going to clear out?"

Mr. Herstein smiled. Englishmen were so blunt, so amusingly blunt. Yet they had the gift of discernment where their own interests were touched. As a matter of logic, Meckles's deduction was perfectly sound. But as a man of the world he would of course put no faith in anything so absurd. Life, Mr. Herstein genially remarked, is a long satire on logic. Between the cradle and the grave men have hardly ten yards of straight going. It is zigzag, twist and double, forward stride and backward slip, and many slip more than they stride, so that the end is worse with them than the beginning.

"You're not a man to lean on broken reeds, are you, Meckles?" he asked.

Meckles thought not.

"Then," said Mr. Herstein playfully, "don't be logical. Yet let us suppose, as you say, that I am going to clear out. What then?"

"Then, sir," replied Meckles, scratching his head, "the question is, what's to become of me?"

Mr. Herstein smiled as one who puts a poser, and is pleased with the result.

"If I died to-night, Meckles, you would have to answer that question for yourself," he rejoined amiably. "There would be no witch to call up Samuel, even if only to say, 'To-morrow shalt thou be with me.'"

"S'pose not," assented Meckles with an uneasy breath. "Dead men don't help much in a fix. If they were any use I've seen a good many of them first and last."

"Yes," returned Mr. Herstein thoughfully, "you have gone to and fro in the midst of death. I daresay some people wish I was dead, Meckles. Tell me," he added with a caressing softness, "you have heard many opinions about me as a landlord, have you not?"

"More'n I can well remember, sir," was the frank answer.

"And they were not—what you would call favourable."

Meckles gurgled, in spite of himself.

"Couldn't be called flatterin', certainly," he said.

Bless Meckles who could blurt odious truths—like

—like an Englishman. Mr. Herstein hitched forward an inch on his chair.

"No man knows the truth better than you, Meckles," he said, a meaning gleam in his eyes. "My honour has been in your hands. If I started the hare you coursed it. Well! I ask one question, When did I go outside the law? when had I aught but my own? Have I ever taken any man's ox or his ass, or anything that was his, except for a just debt as the law allows?"

"Never," returned Meckles emphatically. "Never."

"Yet you tell me evil tongues are busy with my name. Very likely they say I am a hard man.' Meckles nodded unconsciously. "Just so. They say I am an oppressor, that I grind the face of the poor, and take away the portion of the fatherless and the widow. Probably your friend Mr. Emmet and your friend Mr. Dalreemple say that."

Meckles vehemently disclaimed the ascribed friendship.

"They ain't no friends of mine," he protested, "and, what's more, they ain't worth mindin'."

"Ah! Meckles," sighed Mr. Herstein dolefully, "it's quite true that if the angel Gabriel was to come among men he couldn't please everybody."

"Jolly fool if 'e tried," responded Meckles. "The man as starts out on that job'll go hungry most of the time, and have a kickin' for wages."

"I am afraid human nature is very ungrateful, Meckles," said Mr. Herstein in the tone of one who

has tried philanthropy and found it a failure. "Well! what are these honest, innocent people that you and I have been treating so badly? Are they sober? Are they industrious? When they see a public-house do they pass by on the other side? Are they law-abiding? Do they go to church? Are they always anxious to pay their debts?"

Meckles laughed uproariously.

"And because they cannot make criminals and beasts of themselves rent free I am abused. It is a pretty thing, isn't it? Well! look you, Meckles, I stand by the law. It was not made for me. It was made by Englishmen for Englishmen. Let them remember that, and let them abide by it as I do. I do not quarrel with the law. I obey it: and because I take it as I find it they revile me. Perhaps they revile you too, Meckles?"

"Oh! wuss'n they do you, sir," returned Meckles almost jubilantly. "But they can talk 'emselves blue in the face; it don't disturb me so long's I'm attendin' to business 'cordin' to law, as you say."

Mr. Herstein beamed effulgently. Good Meckles; excellent Meckles—sterling British stuff, strong as a bullock, bold as a hundred lions, stubborn as ten donkeys, simple as a three-year-old child.

"Don't disturb you, Meckles," cooed Mr. Herstein.

"Don't give a brass fardin'," rejoined Meckles.

As in a flash Mr. Herstein's countenance changed.

"Neither do I," he cried, sitting up. "I go my own way; I attend to my own business. And

leesten, Meckles, I requite as I receive. I am a man who never forgets good or evil. To him who wrongs me I would do as Joab did unto Abner the son of Ner, though the wrong were twenty years old. Blood for blood. To him who helps me I would do as David the King did unto Mephibosheth for Jonathan his father's sake. Kindness for kindness. That is my fashion. I crush a viper, I tread on a toad. I give an enemy even as an enemy would give me. And," lapsing into his characteristic smile, "my right hand is for a friend. Could I forget you, Meckles?"

"Always tried to do my dooty, sir," Meckles replied modestly, looking as if he hoped that cardinal virtue would be remembered.

"Quite so," said Mr. Herstein, not desiring to pursue the subject too far. "Exactly. All I did in Beulah Place and elsewhere I have done through you. And you've had chances, Meckles, you've had chances. Ready to set up as landlord on your own account, eh?"

"How could I, sir," Meckles replied, "when I was all the time puttin' on the screw for you?"

Mr. Herstein cried out in high amusement.

"Ha, ha, that is good, Meckles; that is excellent, putting on the screw for me. Come, Meckles, you are getting fond of fun. What of the extra percentage you got out of me? Ah! Mr. Thomas Meckles has his head feexed on quite right, and knows how to do a leetle beet extra."

"Oh! that's only just started, sir," Meckles hastened to explain in some uneasiness.

"As if a start was not all a good buseeness man needed," retorted Mr. Herstein in the same bantering mood. "Give him that, and he will do the rest for himself as naturally as a duck sweems. Oh! yes. You have started: that is good. You buy a leetle beet of property: you get rent, you get key-money. You extend your borders. The tenants pay more and more: they provide the capital, which makes you more and more a landlord. Ha, ha! The man who says the Breeteesh law is not good is a beeg fool. You get a thousand pounds of key-money, with that you buy what yields more key-money and more rent. You buy again and again and again. It is compound increase: it is better than Jacob's sheep; it is loafly. Jacob had much trouble with his sheep: your sheep put the shears into your hand to clip them, and the fleeces grow so fast, you are always clip-clipping."

He chuckled, with a distinct inclination to poke his factotum in the ribs.

Meckles owned that in and around Beulah Place and Vernal Avenue fleeces did grow with amazing rapidity, and that notwithstanding a turbulent demeanour the sheep were in reality very easily shorn.

"Well," said Mr. Herstein, in his suavest manner, "I put it like this: Suppose, as you say, I clear out—I only say suppose just for eelustration—then perhaps a leetle advance, never mind the amount

or the rate of eenterest, a leetle advance, and Mr. Meckles—is an East End landlord. There, you need not trouble with thanks—for the present. And, Meckles," he placed his finger significantly on his lips, "you understand?"

"Perfectly," was the prompt answer. "Mum's the word till you speak."

CHAPTER XL

B. B. MAKES A DISCOVERY AND CAUSES A COMMOTION

THE same evening in his hotel Mr. Briscoe Bunting smoked three large cigars in an absorption of silent meditation. Potts having private letters to write for next day's American mail, wrote them at a table close by, and then drew in for the usual half-hour's chat before going to bed. In less than five minutes he was up in disgust with B. B.'s moony cogitations, and it was only when he strode off with a snort that the offender awoke to a sense of his own rudeness.

"Fancied you had caught the sleeping sickness that's so prevalent over here," Potts remarked starchily in reply to his apology.

"I was only thinking, Potts," B. B. explained humbly.

"A man must do a power of thinking when he becomes deaf, dumb, and blind during the operation," rejoined Potts. "As somebody observes somewhere, it's deep deep down, central, dynamic thought."

"Potts, do me the favour to sit down, and excuse my want of manners," said B. B. "I don't know that there was anything particularly deep, or central, or dynamic about my thought. Perhaps it wasn't thought at all, only feeling. I suspect we're always confounding emotion and intellect. Anyway, it was just this: that a man with nothing to do is like an idle comet that goes whisking round the heavens—a nuisance, and perhaps something of a danger as well."

The Potts countenance gave a little twitch of surprise. Was the vivacious B. B. beginning to suffer from the whims and rheums of the lazy unemployed? Was he sick of doing nothing? As a practical man Potts wondered many a time how he held out so long.

"Here you are, Potts," continued B. B., "hustling round the earth a sort of universal harvester, both hands full, so to speak, and the ribbons between your teeth, going all the time like a racer to keep up to your engagements."

"That's 'bout the size of it," Potts admitted. "And you, Bunting?"

"As you see, an eternal anomaly, a violation of natural law, a dawdler in sluggish side currents and backwaters, a killer of old time; one who dreads to grow old, yet never finds the days going fast enough; a cosmopolitan vagrant franked hither and thither by his late father's bankers, for ever wishing to be at home when he's abroad, and

abroad when he's at home, striving for dear life to keep abreast of the foibles and fashions of the age, and not once in a blue moon finding the game worth the candle."

"It's a pretty comprehensive statement," remarked Potts slowly, "and quite candid, as is usual with you, Bunting. I'll say this, that I never knew a man less given to toning and touching up the truth. You're eating your heart out for want of something to do, and as I judge, like a sensible man, you're thinking of giving it up. Possibly you intend to reform, settle down, and perhaps even get married. It's what we all come to in the end. The wildest colt must some day endure the bridle. You'll be lucky, my son, if you escape the spurs."

"I am serious, Potts."

"It's a serious step," returned Potts, "notwithstanding the facilities our country affords for divorce. Once haltered, always haltered; that's the general experience. She's not British, I hope?"

"Since you're so much interested, Potts, I may say she is British; yes, just about as British as they make 'em."

"You were always original, Bunting," said Potts thoughtfully. "Generally speaking, it's the girl that comes to Europe on the matrimonial tow-line—for sake of a title. Americans appear to be putting more and more capital into that kind of investment. The British House of Lords will soon be an American appanage. Well! it don't take my fancy,

fixing up with family portraits and coronets and pedigrees that were never heard of till they're wanted for the British market. I don't know if it takes your fancy."

"No, sir," replied B. B. warmly. "I'm still American. As old Abe would have said, I'm of the people and for the people. That's my creed. And I may tell you at once that my flame takes no stock in family portraits or coronets or pedigrees, nor does she play bridge or wear Paris gowns, or do up her hair with a ten thousand dollar diamond band. Indeed her hair, when it's not in curling pins, is generally all over the shop, as the saying is; but for all that she's a dashed good sort of a girl in her own way, and——"

"Stop," cried Potts. "You're not up to any folly in this pestiferous East End of theirs?"

"Now, my dear Potts," remarked B. B. gaily, "we're getting to business. Fact is, I had an idea of buying some real estate over here. If you go for tubes and electric street railways and all that, why, it might be worth my while to invest in some property."

"If I take up tubes and electric railways I'll spoil your East End real estate," said Potts solemnly. "Yes, sir, if I go into the thing head down there'll be a slump in that kind of property, and don't you forget it."

"I daresay there will still be pickings for a careful man," rejoined B. B., unabashed. "At present there's anything from fifty to five hundred per cent. Even

when you're dumping your million passengers a day into the country round London I think there'll be something left for a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles."

Mr. Potts bent his brows in scrutiny of his friend's face. Where had B. B. got these absurd notions? Mr. Potts suspected a taint of philanthropy or altruism, the effect of a too close contact with the clergy. In the abstract he had no objection whatever to clergymen; but from a financier's point of view they were deplorably unpractical, and in that respect bad guides for B. B.

"Don't you forget," he said impressively, "that if our little deal comes off your East End will be left like a muddy beach at ebb tide."

"Good," cried B. B. jubilantly. "Drain that gigantic cesspool, and you'll be the greatest benefactor of the age."

"Sleep on it," said Mr. Potts. "Sleep on it pretty long and sound. By to-morrow you may have changed your mind."

"If so, put no more faith in the word of Briscoe Bunting," was the light response. "Good-night, Potts, and luck to your draining."

The morrow found B. B. not only resolute, but enthusiastic. Latent forces of his nature had suddenly been called into action, opening new and unsuspected sources of pleasure. Almost for the first time since crossing the threshold of manhood he was alive with a definite purpose, and correspondingly buoyant,

"You say I'm tempting Providence by trying the impossible," he said in reply to Potts's sapient head-shaking. "My dear Potts, I'm very much of Mirabeau's mind concerning that word 'impossible,' that it's a very considerable bit of a blockhead."

Potts sighed dolorously.

"Didn't expect anything like this," he remarked. "Why, you ain't even a Britisher."

"No," answered B. B. "Only a hanger-on of the universal brotherhood that includes all humanity, speaks all known tongues, feels with one big heart, and has no country in particular."

"Ah!" said Potts sorrowfully. "Those who like pretty talk must have it, I suppose," and went forth to the affairs of his syndicate in pity over the fatuities of the idealist. Till the day of Judgment that kind of speculation could have no countenance on 'Change, and therefore no return worth a practical man's consideration.

At the same time B. B. turned to a serious study of his bank account, and presently Asaph despatched a cable message to New York, which brought a cable remittance through Savoury and Son to the Standard Metropolitan Bank. When the transaction was completed Asaph remarked that the amount was big.

"Oh! I'm going right in," B. B. responded. "Mr. Dalrymple and I have spotted the place, and my loose change wasn't enough. You should see that man; Holy Jerusalem, it would do you more good than a specialist's tonic. If the angels in heaven are

happier over the strayed sinner returned they must feel pretty comfortable, that's all. Says himself he feels all the time like dancing a Highland fling in the manner of that little exhibition that drew the sneers of Saul's adorable daughter. I tell you that man's prime, prime," repeated Mr. Bunting, "and so modest he's not aware of doing anything himself; gives all the credit to Mr. Emmet. Well, well! it's splendid. I never enjoyed myself so much in all my life; never, it's a fact."

When he explained his projects to Mrs. Cadwallader Roy and Rachel at a private conference in Park Lane, they found him a man so much after their own hearts that nothing but a fear of impropriety kept them from embracing him together.

"Do me homage, sir," cried Mrs. Cadwallader Roy radiantly.

"If you will have the goodness to tell me on what particular ground, madam, it shall be rendered instantly," returned B. B.

"On what ground," repeated Mrs. Cadwallader Roy. "Why, of course, for giving you an object and a pleasure in life, for detaining you here against your will; in a word, for setting your feet in the right path. Isn't it nice, B. B., to be good?"

"It's nice to have a fresh interest in things, if that's what you mean," he responded.

"Oh! don't quibble; it's nice just to be good. have felt that more and more ever since coming into contact with Mr. Emmet. By the way, my

dear," turning to Rachel, "I had a letter from him this morning, and somehow I don't like it."

"Oh!" cried Rachel, in real concern. He's not ill again, is he?"

"If he said he was I'd be more at ease," said Mrs. Cadwallader Roy. "Men are such contradictions, my dear. When a man cries out you may be sure he's not much hurt; but when he says resignedly he doesn't think there's much wrong, and that in any case he's in the Lord's hand, you may take the thing as serious. I have heard that although they're so troublesome all their lives, in the end men die more quietly than women, and the bravest most quietly of all. Out of pure contrariness they howl over a pin prick and smile with a split heart. You needn't be denying it, B. B., you know it's true. As to Mr. Emmet, it's the unwritten words, the things between the lines, that disturb me. There's not a single complaint in his letter, and he doesn't moralise one little bit. Yet somehow he frightens me, makes me feel as if we were all soap bubbles blown at the caprice of a child. If I'm not mistaken, there's more of vespers than of matins in his song."

"Why," put in B. B., "Mr. Dalrymple and I are just waiting till he comes back."

"Don't wait," rejoined Mrs. Cadwallader Roy quickly. "Don't delay a moment. Get us out of our drowsy, poppy-laden Elysiums. I am haunted by the thought that we moneyed people live wickedly selfish lives. At every corner there's a screen to keep

the wind off us, and in every cold spot a foot-warmer for our comfort. When it rains there's always an umbrella over our heads, and when we're hungry, there's the butler and the pantry. We're all the time shirking life, dodging reality, blindly running away from fact. It'll overtake us some day—and then something horrible will happen."

"Those are my sentiments," said B. B., crisply.

"You go ahead, then," returned Mrs. Cadwallader Roy. "Don't wait for Mr. Emmet. The thing's getting on my nerves. Only last night I had that girl Miry here with tears in her eyes about Mrs. Heath's little boy, the bright little fellow, you remember, Rachel dear, who drove an awl into that wretch of a rent-collector. He's a bonny, bonny boy, as Mr. Dalrymple says in his kindly Scotch way. I wish I could adopt him. You go ahead, B. B., and if Rachel and I can help you must call upon us, mustn't he, dear?"

"Yes, indeed he must," answered Rachel, whose heart was torn by all she heard. Besides, Asaph was interested in this new project.

Ten days later, after a busy and exciting time, Mr. Bunting reported progress in Park Lane, and brought a piece of astounding news.

"Well, it's done," he told Mrs. Cadwallader Roy. "Settled, fixed. I'm a slum lord."

"Yes?" she said breathlessly.

"Yes," he repeated. "And you wouldn't guess the seller."

She gazed at him in questioning surprise.

"Shall I give you the name?" he asked. "No, you shall read it for yourself."

He unrolled a document; she glanced at the signature, started, looked more closely, and gave a cry of alarm.

"Oh! my dear," she gasped, "my dear," and then as she collapsed panting into a chair,—"This is too dreadful. Does Rachel, do they know?"

"Not yet," answered B. B. quietly.

CHAPTER XLI

MRS. CADWALLADER ROY AND B. B. TAKE COUNSEL TOGETHER

A LONG minute she gazed in scared silence at B. B. Then, in a tone of despair, as of one vainly trying to rally flustered wits, she added, "Whatever's to be done?"

"Why, go on with it, of course," was the answer.

She rose abruptly, the colour flooding back to her face, her nimble, compact figure vibrating from crown to sole, and paced with short, quick steps, like an agitated bird, from end to end of the room.

"Do you know what going on with it means?" she demanded, pausing suddenly. "B. B., you've gone and brought us pop on a tragedy; that's what you have done."

He could see the throb and flutter of her bosom under its decking of lace and jewels. Her emotion surprised and puzzled him. It was like witnessing the perturbation of a celestial body to see this cool-headed, self-possessed woman of the world put out.

"It isn't quite so bad as death," he ventured in polite remonstrance.

"It's worse," she cried vehemently. "It's much worse. We've all got to die some time or other, but this is like—like being flayed alive."

"Well," rejoined B. B., in the tone of one unjustly accused of bringing about a convulsion of nature, "I guess that unless the eternal course of things were reversed, and the bottom knocked out of the logical sequence of fact, you couldn't expect this little game to be all comedy."

She took another turn, wheeled like a hawk in air, and fastened on him a pair of eyes made disconcertingly brilliant by excitement.

"Is it very bad, then?" she asked, almost as if defying him to state the worst.

"Several degrees worse than Milton's milder shades of Purgatory," was the reply. "I count it a pretty full-flavoured foretaste of the place farther on."

"You must not be profane," she returned severely. "In a crisis of this sort profanity is as much out of place as merriment at a funeral."

"I have lately seen merriment at funerals," he gravely assured her. "And I'm not profane. Shall I tell you why? Because no profanity of which I am capable would come within measurable distance of doing the thing justice. That would need far higher talents than Heaven has seen fit to bestow on me."

"Oh, dear, dear," she exclaimed; and then, changing all at once to the cooing mood, "Won't you tell me?"

Curiosity was tempering alarm.

"Can't, though I hate to refuse a lady."

"Why can't you, pray?"

"Because I respect a lady's feelings."

She gave a little puff of resentment and disdain.

"B. B., in our country's unmatchable phrase, you make me tired. See what it is to be a woman, especially in England."

"Is Mrs. Cadwallader Roy dissatisfied with the present state of the woman question in England?" he asked with mock sedateness.

"Briscoe Bunting, do please curb your frivolity," she retorted. "And listen, for obviously you need instruction. There are two orders of women in England, and I don't know which is the more despicable. One will not so much as look over a hedge because a section of society says it isn't good form; the other will take the hedge at a bound, though oceans of mire were beyond, because another section considers it grandmotherly to cherish commonsense and decency. One drinks tea like a saint, and talks scandal like a priest; the other affects the manly vices—drinks, smokes, and would raise a moustache but for the disability of nature."

"Oh," responded B. B., "I've seen ladies with great beards under their muffler, as Sir Hugh Evans says. But I guess that in a general way you're

right in your division of the hypocrite and the rake. It's mighty hard lines on the womanly woman trying to steer a middle course. It's hot water or pickle in spite of her."

"Well, well," Mrs. Cadwallader Roy cried impatiently, "the point now is that if I were a man I could go where you went, and see what you saw without any cackle of the gossips. Being a woman, I'm debarred, and you're mean enough to keep your knowledge to yourself because you think I'd be shocked. Let me tell you I shouldn't be half so much shocked as I am by the news you bring. Poor Rachel! She never guessed this."

"Think not?" said B. B., arching his eyebrows meaningly.

"No more than I did, I'm sure."

"And you didn't guess the least little bit, which proves there are more things in heaven and earth —you remember the rest. In the course of your post-graduate studies have you never learned that some things are a good deal darker than the moon in eclipse; some countenances as void of meaning as an unstained parchment; some intellects cute enough to give the wiliest fox ninety points in a hundred and win easily?"

She threw herself into the recess of a voluminous lounge chair, and looked up at him, palpitating like a captured fawn.

"I guess," she said abruptly, "you know about Asaph and Rachel."

"Read about it only yesterday," he replied.

"Read about it," she repeated, her eyes widening.

"Yes, one of your Society penny-a-liners ferreted the delightful secret. The names were not given, but the reference was unmistakable. I cut the thing out. Shall I read it?"

"Oh! do, please."

"It's very impertinent, and perhaps I'd better not."

"I insist," she said, in a tone of decision that was not to be disobeyed.

"Very well," he returned, bowing. "Here it is, *verbatim et literatim*:—'*On dit*' (the scribbler, you see, must air his scrap of French like a beggar proud of a picked-up sixpence), '*On dit*, that an event of unusual interest to the social world may shortly be expected. I learn from an unexceptionable source that a marriage has been arranged'—(I like that word arranged), 'and will take place at an early date between the youthful European partner in a great American financial house and the lovely daughter of one of our most noted London financiers. It is further whispered that the gentleman's young widowed sister, who is one of our most brilliant social lights, may for the second time change her name, the prospective bridegroom being a member of one of our oldest English families. These international alliances must be accounted among the happiest auguries of the day. Needless to say, Society is on the *qui vive*.' Appetising, isn't it?"

She gave a gasp of consternation.

"I hadn't seen it," she answered in a strained voice.

"Naturally not," he returned. "A Queen can never see all the references to herself and her Court, and, of course, she misses just the most interesting."

"Worse and worse," she cried, disregarding B. B.'s subtle flattery. "For myself I don't care that," and she snapped her white jewelled fingers. "It's none of their impudent business what I do, or what I don't do, but it's different about Asaph. I guessed there was something between my brother and Rachel, a kind of idle fancy, but nothing more, or he'd have told me."

A curious expression stole into B. B.'s face.

"We're old friends, and just at present fellow exiles," he observed slowly. "With the double privilege of old friendship and exile, I am going to tell you something. As you know, I am Asaph's friend as well as yours, and no relation could make me prouder than that. Well! men talk together, jest, exchange confidences, and so forth, just, almost, as if they were women. And Asaph told me something, intending, as I guess, that it should be passed on to you."

She had jerked unconsciously out of the silken recess of the great lounge chair, and was sitting on the very edge, an image of beating intentness.

"You are right," B. B. went on with the deliberation of a criminal judge. "Only your guess does not go quite far enough."

"Briscoe Bunting," she cried, in an agony of alarm, "you're not going to tell me they've made the thing up?"

"Your intuition makes it unnecessary," was the reply.

She rose like one lifted by an invisible hand above, B. B. unconsciously rising at the same time.

"My brother going to marry Rachel Herstein," she said, in a kind of breathless incredulity. "B. B., you dumbfound and stupefy me. I am giddy. Tell me, is there no way out?"

"To save Asaph, you mean?"

"Oh! to save us all, Asaph included."

"The documents on my side are actually signed," he said, "and the lawyers are waiting to complete the transaction. But say the word, and I'll gladly pay forfeit to have the whole thing cancelled."

"Would that be any good?" she asked, the fear of one trembling between life and death in eyes and voice. "It seems as if the whole world were reeling, and that nothing could ever steady it again."

"It will be a postponement at least," he answered doubtfully.

"Only a postponement," she rejoined, "and then when it would be too late worse might happen."

"I think it very likely that worse would happen," he owned.

"You believe that sooner or later revelations are inevitable, and that in this case the beginning of evil is sure to be better than the end?"

"You have anticipated my meaning exactly."

Her breast was dancing deliriously, but her clear sense and resolute will were conquering.

"B. B.," she said, looking him straight in the eyes, "a very ugly crisis has come upon us. We must do something at once—you and I. In the meantime will you keep those documents tight in your own possession for twenty-four hours, till our wits have a chance to cool and clarify?"

"For as many hours as you like," was the emphatic reply.

CHAPTER XLII

MR. DALRYMPLE AND JIM: A TERRIBLE DILEMMA

AFTER that hurried visit on the evening of the great feast, Mr. Dalrymple went almost daily to Vernal Avenue, with a heavy heart and such help as he durst offer. Only by a well-studied finesse was it possible to aid the Heaths, because they belonged to the class which conceals its need and its misery, as sores to be vigilantly kept out of sight; nay, that even throttles despair, as if calamity were the worst form of disgrace. How are you to feed those who avow they are not hungry, in spite of looks that declare they are starving, or clothe such as protest they are perfectly warm, though you see them shiver in their threadbare meagreness? The order was the constant perplexity and distress of Mr. Dalrymple's life, baffling him with its power of mute endurance, forcing him to apply to charity the methods of the detective. For he knew that necessity is seldom clamorous, and that silence often covers a breaking heart. With the Heaths he had to wait but a little while to have his most piteous suspicions confirmed.

One wild wet night, when none who could be at ease under cover would venture abroad, he saw Chris slip furtively into the place of tragic bargaining, which is at once (so Heaven-born rulers appoint) the common resort of vice, and the last refuge of honest penury. His fears were justified then. She was keeping her family alive on the remnants of household goods. He did not wait to see her come forth, for it would hurt her to be caught in the desperate office. But next day, by a well-contrived accident, he met Jim near the dinner hour.

"Just going to have a snack to eat in my own room," he said, as if rejoicing in the chance of company. "Come, I want a chat."

"Not at meal-time, sir," Jim replied, with the timidity which comes of a long course of misfortune. Mr. Dalrymple's response was to link his arm in Jim's. "It's so lonely eating by one's self," he said, like one suing for a favour. "Come, for sake of company."

They had to ascend a steep, narrow stair to the minister's modest pair of rooms, and the guest went up first. Midway he stumbled, clutched dizzily at the railing, missed, and fell back into the ready arms behind. The Viking of the Gospel carried him up, and set him, tremulous and deathly white, on the sofa. With a pathetic shame Jim tried to account for the momentary faintness on every ground save the right one, Mr. Dalrymple taking conjectures in sympathetic good faith. When a man who has

known plenty and the pride of life falters in sheer weakness of defeat, it is the office of a friend to protect his pride. A few spoonfuls of soup, gulped with terrible eagerness, dispelled the hue of death, aye, and kindled a ravenous light in the sunken eyes. When meat followed, only the struggling sense of manhood kept the famished eater from the voracity of the hunger-bitten beast. Mr. Dalrymple knew all too well the fight that was going on between the animal and the man, the animal ferocious to devour, the man holding back in hot shame; but he delicately ignored it, chatting lightly, in the manner likeliest to divert a fevered mind, and taking prudent care that his guest did not eat too hurriedly. Of that error of the starving comes sudden death. Not once, but many times Mr. Dalrymple had seen famishing men and women die with the food in their throats, as if nature were perpetrating a bit of grim satire.

And indeed Jim Heath was in sorer plight than even his host guessed, for he had fasted fifty hours that a woman and two children might have a morsel to eat; and for many days and hours before had dined and supped on dry crusts. Now the ecstasy of eating was an excruciating pain. Mr. Dalrymple did not misunderstand the beaded sweat on the forehead, but he smiled, like the surgeon who says blithely in the dread moment, "Courage, it will be all over in a moment, and then we shall be well again." Blessed deceit of the tender heart! Will

not the angels smile on it approvingly, and God Himself say in compassion, "It is for his brother's sake; all things are forgiven to love."

With more than a lawyer's cunning, Mr. Dalrymple touched on Jim's affairs and bit by bit drew forth an agonising tale. It was not new; alas! it was as old as injustice; but it marked fresh variations and ingenious developments of man's inhumanity to man. When fortune turns unkind not all the hierarchy of fiends can be half so remorseless in cruelty. First she brought Jim into a slum; then she delivered him to the oppressor; then smote him with illness; the illness was as the total loss of capital; the loss of capital as surrender into the hands of a deadly enemy.

The rest seemed the automatic process of natural law. Except in spasmodic religion or sporadic charity, London wants nothing with maimed and broken men but the little that can still be pressed out of them. Hence, like a huge, slow-grinding mill, it continues to maim and break, tearing here, crushing there, squeezing out the last drop of blood, and so for ever taking from him that has little the little that he has. As the whole herd of deer turns and rends the hapless one that is stricken, so all the forces of Babylon bear against the children of misfortune. To-day the cripple halts, to-morrow he will be down, on the third day he will disappear, and Babylon will rage on unheeding. When Heath lost his footing among the quicksands, not all his energy

and skill could regain it, for he struggled as one beset by harpies. Unable to rise, he sank, till presently the sun went out. Such was the purport of Jim Heath's tale; such in essence is the history of tens of thousands like him.

The minister waited patiently until the overcharged heart relieved itself. A stony composure followed, for pain at last provides its own antidote, the anodyne of exhaustion or insensibility.

Yet while the emotions slept, the intellect, as in a troubled dream, was extraordinarily active. The immediate effect was a terrible problem for Mr. Dalrymple.

"When you see them that's more to you than your own life suffering, suffering without any hope of getting better, you may pray to God to take them away, mayn't you, sir?" Jim asked.

Mr. Dalrymple owned there are times when one is glad to see his beloved at peace—even in death.

"What I was wondering, sir," returned Jim, "is, would it be wrong to help them away?"

You would have thought an unseen hand had struck Mr. Dalrymple.

"Heath," he cried, terror and rebuke mingled in his voice, "what are you driving at? For God's sake, put such thoughts for ever from you. Lay not that sin on your soul, for it would not be forgiven."

An awesome expression overspread Jim's face. For a moment something trembled on his tongue,

but he shut his lips fast, and the terrible secret was held. It concerned an incident which occurred on the night of the great feast, when Jim was alone with the children. After a little chattering Peter'j'n and the baby fell asleep, but their father sat thinking the fearful thoughts that come of despair and distraction. All at once he started from his frenzied reverie. The floor was mottled with rats, which scampered over his feet, climbed in horrible greed upon the bed, and sniffed at the cradle. Next instant they were gone, but Jim stood in a sweating coldness. This was what he had brought his loved ones to; this was their place of refuge—among the sewer rats that would devour but for his presence and interference. God in Heaven, was it true? Was it possible? Then it must end.

Shaking like one in the throes of an ague, he closed his eyes hard, then all at once opened them very wide, and with sensations not to be described bent over Peter'j'n. "Lord God help me," he moaned, "one moment—just one moment."

Peter'j'n moved in his sleep, and smiled as at the caress of angels. The smile of childish innocence is God's look of pity and benison. It seemed to the cracking brain that a great light flashed through the room, such a light as may have smitten the persecuting Saul on his way to Damascus. Peter'j'n opened his eyes, and looked up, still smiling.

"Daddy," he murmured fondly at sight of the face above him, "dear daddy."

Daddy dropped to his knees, quivering, and a pair of soft, weak arms clasped his neck; and as he bent his head to hide his face, a weak voice prattled about mummy and the big party, and Mr. Dalrymple, and Miry, and Dolf, and the man with the mouthful of birds. It would be nice to be at that treat; but Peter'j'n was not sorry to have been left at home with daddy; daddy was good and kind, he loved daddy—all that and more, opening the tiny arms to their utmost. In his torment daddy could have cried for mercy, for the little tongue stabbed like a dagger.

"Have you said your prayers to-night, Peter'j'n?" he asked, when he could trust himself to speak.

Peter'j'n tried to think; but his head was not clear. Perhaps in the excitement of seeing mummy off to the big party he forgot, and after that he was very tired.

"Say them now, darling," Jim returned, and, holding his father's hand, Peter'j'n prayed, as was his wont, in absolute faith, for blessings on those he loved.

"Take care of sister and daddy, dear God," he pleaded, and added, as if speaking into a listening ear, "bring mummy back quick from the big party."

Mr. Dalrymple heard nothing of that dire conflict in the cellar, because there are things which God alone can understand. But he heard enough to give him yet another spasm of that pain in the heart which is the slum-worker's peculiar portion.

"It's good of you to tell me all that," he told Jim at parting. "Believe me, I appreciate your confidence. Tell Mrs. Heath I'll look round in the evening."

Accordingly, as early as he could be spared from the mission, he went to Vernal Avenue, carrying almost the entire contents of his larder, with supplementary stores picked up by the way.

The night was bitter, with the piercing bitterness of cold and rain; and the walls of the Heath cellar oozed slime.

"This is no place for a sick child," he said, his eyes on Peter'j'n. Chris replied that she had thoughts of the hospital, but lacked the courage for parting. Besides, was she not herself Peter'j'n's best nurse?

"Peter'j'n," said Mr. Dalrymple suddenly, "do you like me well enough to come with me?"

The boy called out in gladness at the prospect, but immediately added the condition that the whole household should accompany him. Without definite agreement on that point, Mr. Dalrymple took off his great coat, and wrapped it about the wondering Peter'j'n. Then he told Chris to get ready.

"Where are we going, sir?" she asked, her heart beating a note of alarm.

"To my rooms for the present," was the answer. "I'll shift for myself."

He could not see Peter'j'n die without making an effort to save him.

CHAPTER XLIII

A CHANGE OF QUARTERS AND A CALL IN THE NIGHT

IN the hurry of affairs a bachelor may readily overlook a baby, but the anxious heart of a mother makes no such error of forgetfulness. It was found, of course, that Peter'j'n could not go and the baby stay. "Certainly not, certainly not," Mr. Dalrymple admitted in instant apology for his masculine want of thought. "Tuck the little woman, please, and come along."

His own arms were about Peter'j'n, Jim took charge of the baby, and Chris, half surreptitiously, collected the remnants of clothing left to herself and the children. It was a bitter business, that gathering up of the frayed odds and ends which were of no value to the trafficker of the pawnshop, and would have been much bitterer but for the artful alleviation of the minister, who was as one impatient to have the guests he most desired at his table and by his fireside. When presently he had his desire and the fair white cloth was spread, and the teapot sent forth its cosy aroma, he induced

his landlady, a pious mother-in-general, with a face that was a benediction, and a low Scots voice that was balm, to take the place of hostess.

Knowing the loss of children, and the memory that survives, she lamented over Peter'j'n's lack of appetite, declaring that little boys, like little dogs, should always be in trim to eat.

"Oh! the appetite will be rampant in no time," remarked the host cheerfully, "and then the fun will be to keep it going; won't it, Peter'j'n?"

Peter'j'n turned big wistful eyes on him, eyes that gazed wonderingly as if seeing far-off things, visible to them alone. That look had lately made his mother weep much in secret, and plead on bended knees that the old bright expression might be restored. Now it smote her heart more heavily than ever, and made the motherly landlady heave a smothered sigh.

After tea Mr. Dalrymple filled a pipe for Jim, but for himself made an excuse of business elsewhere, and withdrew, wishing to avoid the parting between husband and wife.

He was waiting outside, however, when Jim left, and the pair walked together to Vernal Avenue On the way it seemed to Jim that his companion was moved by a most unholy and unfeeling demon of levity, and this conviction was confirmed when there came a proposal made as if life were mere frolic and frivolity.

"Heath," said Mr. Dalrymple whimsically, "your

wife and children occupy my quarters; fair exchange being no robbery, I don't see why I shouldn't occupy theirs."

The insane suggestion threw Jim into a fever of dismay, but the more ardently he dissuaded, the more gleefully Mr. Dalrymple pictured the fun of the thing.

"So if you don't mind putting me up, Heath," he said finally, cutting off remonstrance, "I'll stay with you, and we'll have a night off together."

The prospect of enjoyment did not ease Jim. How was he in his slimy dungeon to accommodate or entertain such a guest? If Chris were by with her resourceful and clever fingers things would be different. By a hundred magic touches she would hide sordidness, and give distress itself almost an air of comfort. However, since the obstinate must be obstinate, he could but make the best of the worst.

Their course lay by the Cherry Tree, and as they passed who should come forth, laughing loudly and walking unsteadily, but the Glasgow man. Mr. Dalrymple greeted him reproachfully.

"Oh! Davie, Davie," he said. "If your dead mother saw this."

Davie leered in the light of a gas lamp.

"It's a comfort to think she canna, minister," he returned. "I widna vex her."

"How do you know that you're not vexing her?" Mr. Dalrymple demanded. "What's wrong now?"

Davie's countenance broke into contortions, that might have indicated either pain or mirth.

"Dod, a gey an' queer kind o' complaint," he answered. "A gill, minister, that ye canna guess either the name or nature o't. Did ye ever hear tell o' a man wantin' a wife, and dead beat to get her?"

"No, I don't think I ever have," returned Mr. Dalrymple.

"I was thinkin' that," said Davie, one eye closed in a portentous grimace. "Well! that's what's the matter wi' Davie, wantin' a wife and no' able to get her. I told ye it was an extrornar complaint."

He laughed thickly, but immediately became grave, as with the gravity of a great wrong, and then fiercely resentful.

"Am sayin'," he told Mr. Dalrymple, "that man Pickens is gettin' clean beyond endurance. What d'ye think he had the impidence to say to me only last night in by there?" nodding to the Cherry Tree. "'If ye stop runnin' after Miry,' says he, 'ye can have Sal. She's not so bad an article,' says he, 'just a bit shop-soiled, that's all.' A'll kill that man."

"I don't think I'd try if I were you," rejoined Mr. Dalrymple quietly. "He's a tough customer."

"Too tough for steel?" inquired Davie. "I've given some tough customers what they never got the better of afore now."

"Don't forget that murder's a hanging business," Mr. Dalrymple warned him.

"Just so," returned Davie, taking one step backward and two steps forward. "Just exactly so, and

a'm glad ye mentioned it, for there's a point ye'll maybe explain to me, you that's so gleg at the learnin'. It's this: When big folks fall out—emperors and kings and governments—they send me and the like o' me to polish off the other side, as ye might say. There's no word o' murder then. It's 'hooray,' and 'here's to ye,' the more ye send to kingdom come. But if I take the same plan with them that angers me, it's murder. What I want to know, sir, is this: Where does the Bible justify that difference atween great folks and common people? I'd like that redd up."

"So that you could kill your man with an easy mind," laughed Mr. Dalrymple. "Ah! Davie, Davie, London doesn't improve you."

"No," assented Davie disconsolately. "Too much tares for the wheat. Righteousness has no chance in this pit of perdition. Does it agree with you, sir?"

In cloudiness of brain he forgot his question in ethics and religion; but he remembered his wrong with a raging heat, now against Pickens singly, now against Miry, and again against both together.

Love, jealousy, and the brand of old Highland whiskey made in East London were at once a madness and a confusing mist.

"Will ye tell me what the man does for a livin'?" he cried, after a run of expletives, which Mr. Dalrymple cut short with a "Hush, hush; whist, Davie." "Though he never works that I can see, he's aye flush o' cash, drinks like a lord, goes and

comes, gets up and lies doon as he likes, an's just as idle as lilies o' the valley that's arrayed far brawer nor Solomon for a' his wives. If it's all right, then a'm thinkin the deil's an honest man ; that's my mind o't. And Miry!" He tossed his arms in the air to signify disgust. "Ugh! I wonder how God could make women a' kinks and thraws and ravels."

Like a free-born Briton with a grievance against his country and his kind, he insisted on occupying the middle of the pavement. His dramatic gestures and choppy motion brought him into violent contact with passengers; this in turn brought a running fire of profanity, to which Davie replied intermittently with angry sarcasm. Presently in the midst of the throng appeared the helmet of the law.

"Is it a discoorse to the winds yer givin' us, or has the thing a manin'?" Constable O'Ryan inquired over a semi-circle of heads.

Now Davie being in a warlike mood, drew himself up, mentally recalling the days of his military glory, and jeered defiantly at the valour of the Metropolitan police. He didn't give "that," cracking his fingers at the outraged law, for anything in municipal blue, though it should vaunt itself in all the brogues of Ireland, and if it wanted a fight the occasion was admirably opportune.

Thrusting out his elbows as prods, he cleared a space in the crowd for action, and Mr. Dalrymple's hair rose at hearing himself named umpire.

"The match is off for the present, then," he said,

stepping quickly in front of his militant compatriot. "I wouldn't be seen among such a rabble," he whispered hastily. "Why should you soil your hands with the best of them?"

The idea pleased Davie, who went off with Jim, while Mr. Dalrymple stayed a moment to thank Tim for his forbearance.

"I'll be responsible for him," he said. "Fact is, he's bothered. Love and whiskey—you know."

"Och, the pore bhoy," returned Tim in a voice of pity. Davie's gibes had made the Hibernian blood hot, but it instantly cooled and relented in a brotherly sympathy. "'Tis a tryin' expayriance for the best av us. Take care av him, sorr."

Davie went home with Jim and Mr. Dalrymple, the minister providing a ready-made supper from a beef and ham shop by the way. After supping Davie returned to his right mind, and Mr. Dalrymple referred gingerly to the cause of the outbreak.

"Is it very bad, Davie?" he asked.

"Yer the best friend I have, and I'll just tell ye, sir," was the answer. "When I thought a' thing settled and right, like a clap o' thunder I found it a' unsettled and wrong."

"And the drink being bad you were upset. Perhaps I can understand."

Davie shook his head dolorously.

"I widna say but ye've had yer share o' trouble wi' the lasses," he rejoined. "That's appointed unto man; but there's more nor that, and ministers

dinna ken everything, neither the daftness o' gettin' fou, nor the pain o' soberin' up again. But they've a great deal of influence over women, and I was thinking maybe——"

He paused with a shamefaced look.

"Yes," said the minister.

"Maybe I shouldna say it," returned Davie.

"By all means say it," urged Mr. Dalrymple.

"It was only this, sir, that if you was to speak a word to Miry maybe she would——"

"Take a man who turns to whiskey when he's disappointed. My notion is that Miry's a girl of sense."

Davie crimsoned and squirmed guiltily.

"I'm interested in you, and I'm interested in her," Mr. Dalrymple went on, "but I'll not so much as wag a finger in the matter, except on one condition, that till there's more of it, you don't cross the door of the Cherry Tree or any other place of the kind. If you're dull in the evenings look me up at the mission—Miry will be there—or I daresay our friend Heath will be glad to see you here occasionally."

"Of course," put in Jim.

Thrilling as if he saw the gates of Heaven ajar, Davie rose, and in token of joyous assent produced a pint bottle from his coat pocket.

"And you'll take charge of this," he cried, handing it over. "It was for a dram in the day o' tribulation. But Lord lead us not into temptation—a grand

prayer that I've thought of many a time after the deed was done and I was repentin' with a sore head. There, sir, there, as sure's death, a'll go happy to my eight hours' turn of the bunk up by."

"Good," said Mr. Dalrymple. "He's a man who puts temptation behind him."

When Davie left in a glow of hope and virtue the others smoked another pipe, and presently they kneeled together. The prayer was very brief and very poignant. Mr. Dalrymple could scarcely articulate; but he knew that his inability mattered nothing, since the thoughts of the heart were of more consequence than the utterances of the tongue. In relation to Peter'j'n he put up the beautiful petition of his native Church, "Lord, if it be Thy will, spare young and useful lives." They rose in a choking silence, and by a look and a gesture Jim indicated that the bed was for his guest. But Mr. Dalrymple protested, and in the end Jim lay down on it himself, while the minister made the best of a settle, a relic of other days, that stood against the wall. Was it premonition that he lay down with no more than the clerical jacket and collar taken off?

For a long time both lay vividly awake. Twice Jim got up stealthily in the dark to scare off the rats, thinking that Mr. Dalrymple was asleep; and Mr. Dalrymple listened in a horror of pity. Poor Heath, poor Chris, poor Peter'j'n! At last he dozed, and it seemed he had just lost consciousness

when there came a terrified rapping and calling at the door. Jim sprang up to admit the caller, and Mr. Dalrymple immediately struck a match. By its light he saw the drawn, tear-stained face of Chris; he saw also that she was panting as from a race.

"Peter'j'n" was all she could gasp.

"Peter'j'n." And he knew the call had come.

CHAPTER XLIV

EBB-TIDE

IT was a mercy that Mr. Dalrymple lay like a soldier on his arms ready for action. Even in the brief process of getting into jacket and collar his fingers seemed cramped and clumsy, such was his desperate haste.

"Have you called a doctor?" he asked, and on being answered in the negative by Chris, "Well, you both go at once to my rooms. I'll run round and pick up Dr. Jopling on the way."

Next minute he was off, running in the empty street as he had never run for cup or medal in the days when he was most given to athletics.

He found a haggard and weary man undressing for an hour's sleep after twenty hours of strain.

"I'm afraid of dropping asleep in the street," was the response to his breathless request. "I can scarcely drag my feet, and my head's ringing. Ah! Dalrymple, what a lot you and I chose when we came into the slums."

"Not the bowers of Eden, to be sure," rejoined Mr.

Dalrymple, breathing quickly from exertion and impatience. "And I know how you are driven. But, Jopling, for dear love, you'll come now, and you'll make haste. Do make haste or it may be too late. There's an accusing voice in my breast. I ought to have seen how things were going, and taken the boy sooner. But your skill may save him yet."

Dr. Jopling drew a long deep sigh.

"There's an accusing voice in my breast, too," he returned. "I also ought to have seen better, and acted more promptly."

He passed his hand wearily over his forehead. "Ah! dear me, how little the best of us can do! Dalrymple, I have bad news for you; Emmet is going to the place whence he shall not return."

The languor and pathos of utter heart-weariness were in the voice. On Mr. Dalrymple the effect was as a stinging blow.

"Jopling," he cried, like one in a sudden passion of anger and resentment, "how dare you say that? I'll lay violent hands on any man who tells me Emmet is dying. It cannot be; it must not be."

The doctor went on quietly dressing.

"Ah! me," he murmured, as if to himself. "There's a curse on this East End that will do for us all. Men give their lives for others, and the others are not one whit the better—a noble folly evidently, and no more." He glanced at the startled, suffering face beside him. "It seems to me, Dalrymple, as if the

tragedy of Calvary were repeated every day in our slums. I know many a Gethsemane. Perhaps we're to blame ourselves."

"You can't apply that remark to Emmet," said Mr. Dalrymple hoarsely.

"It's of Emmet I am thinking," was the reply. "Too forgetful of self; too mindful of others. Selfishness is a common enough possession, God knows; and yet some of my dearest friends lack it sorely. Oh! if they'd only remember the pith and marrow of all medical teaching, that for every wrong done to her Nature will have her revenge, and that she takes it to the last jot and tittle without one atom of pity, one scruple of remorse, one shadow of regard for lofty motives. But we can't dwell on that now. Lest I shouldn't have another opportunity, I'm going to ask a favour equally to yourself and to me, and it is this: that you take the earliest train in the morning, and go to Emmet. You may be in time yet, and he's been asking for you. 'Send Dalrymple,' he said, and if you saw his expression you wouldn't hesitate a second. 'Send Dalrymple.' I won't tell what he said about you."

"But he was doing well when I heard last," said Mr. Dalrymple, his anger passing into consternation.

"Yes; but he wasn't eight hours ago. If all the wise men of the East were at his elbow they couldn't prevent the indiscretions of Emmet. Except one, whom I won't name, I don't know any man who squanders his resources so recklessly and prodigally."

"Been out preaching for funds again?" asked Mr. Dalrymple, intuitively guessing the cause of the relapse.

"Twice, two days running," replied Dr. Jopling. "Oh! the disastrous folly of it, drawing on that poor heart of his as if it were an organ of unlimited energy. Four vehement sermons when he could hardly stand upright without a prop, four pieces of terrible pleading with his last ounce of strength. It makes me ill and angry to think of it—after he had promised to be quiet. A railway journey and a chill did the rest, and there'll be silence soon. I tell you Dalrymple, God Himself sets a limit to these things, and Emmet has crossed the line. You go to him as quickly as may be. After an hour's rest I meant to rouse you for the first train. I tell you now lest I shouldn't have another chance. For just at present I'm not in the least sure of myself: I'm like a man in a bewildering chaos of earthquakes. Sometimes I wonder what it all means, whither we are going, and what the end is to be. There, I'm ready now—I think. We'll get a little medicine on our way. I know what's wanted."

When the two ascended the stairs, noiselessly as shadows, swiftly as men fleeing for fear, Jim and Chris had already arrived. An eerie stillness was on the place, the stillness of foreboding and bated breath. The minister being very sick at heart, stayed in the outer room; but the doctor went straight in, where Peter'j'n lay quietly on Mr.

Dalrymple's bed, his tiny wafer hands clasping a hand each of his father and mother.

He smiled up with a flicker of his old brightness at his friend the doctor, as though to say, "Now I shall be better in no time: here's the man who cures sick little boys." When, however, the doctor, with womanly gentleness, suggested for sake of air that daddy and mummy should go out to keep Mr. Dalrymple company, an instant expression of terror came into his face, and his fingers clenched with all their feeble might. Something, he cried out, had been trying all night to pull him away, and it was only by holding on to daddy and mummy that he was able to save himself. If he let go for a moment "the thing" would drag him off. The imploring, terrified look was not to be resisted, and Dr. Jopling, who understood the clinging instinct of the young life, replied that daddy and mummy might stay, then.

A minute later the landlady came forth alone, her apron at her eyes. Mr. Dalrymple silently placed a chair for her; but she shook her head, and passed on to her own part of the house. So he sat down again by the sleeping baby, thinking in a tumultuous whirl of Peter'j'n and Mr. Emmet hanging on the dark verge, of the scores and hundreds, likewise victims of greed and wrong, hidden away in the holes and caverns whither they had crawled to die unheeded, of the whole black world of oppression, misery, and crime that was crushing them all.

Had England no eyes for the rank injustice and reeking iniquity in her midst, the frightful disease which, slowly it might be, but surely as the judgment of Heaven, was corrupting and killing? Was she drunk or drugged that she did not feel it? Was she mad that she did not care? Or was she so much engrossed in business and pleasure that she had neither heart for suffering nor thought for common decency? What were Christians doing that greed and cruelty were allowed to harry at will, to slay innocent children, and torture men and women into untimely, dishonoured graves? Why did men of his own cloth—the clergymen and ministers—not make the land ring with denunciation, so that the deafest in high places should hear, and the most callous feel that, if only as a matter of policy and self-interest, oppression and social plundering must be put down?

He recalled B. B.'s pertinent question about the Church. Was she, too, indifferent? In the seductions of the world, was she disregarding the injunctions of the Master, that she left solitary stragglers and isolated camp-followers to relieve distress, destitution and misery? God forgive and rouse her. He rose perspiring at the thought of that awful treason. Was Christ to be for ever grieved by a hostile Jerusalem? nay, worse, was He to be for ever pained by sleeping disciples?

A movement within attracted his attention, and he held his breath at the sound of a stifled sob. Almost

in the same moment the door opened, and the doctor passed out, closing it softly behind him.

"Well?" said Mr. Dalrymple, in a tense whisper.

"Go in," said the doctor, dropping into a chair. "I have done what I can: your time has come."

It seemed that an iron hand gripped Mr. Dalrymple's throat. The muscles tightened in an excruciating pain that ran down the taut cords direct to the heart.

"What's wrong?" he asked, in a voice of suffocation.

"What's so often wrong with my patients," was the answer. "Poisoned, through and through; poisoned in every fibre, in every tissue and nerve and artery."

The doctor pressed his brow as though to ease a throbbing pain.

"I can fight honest, straightforward disease, but I can do nothing against this insidious poisoning. As things are, we doctors call this death from natural causes; if there were justice, we should call it murder. But there's no justice, nor any sign of its coming. I am sick, Dalrymple; leave me and go in."

He bent forward, burying his face in his hands.

Half an instant Mr. Dalrymple gazed down in a kind of stupor; then he quietly turned the door handle, and stepped into the inner room. Next moment there reached the doctor a double sound, the sound of a pleading voice and a wail of mortal woe, and instinctively he covered his ears. In a

little while Mr. Dalrymple returned, sat down in silence, and with a shaking hand stirred the fire.

"I'll put a rug over you, Jopling," he said, suddenly looking up, "and perhaps you can have a sleep. Please don't go ; you may be needed."

"I won't go, and I won't sleep," replied the doctor. "Got anything to read?"

His eye fell on a battered school edition of Catullus.

"Give it to me," he said. "Curious that I should have found Emmet reading in that very book ; the Odes, I think."

He turned half a dozen pages, read a bit, and threw the volume down.

"My God!" he gasped.

"What is it, Jopling?"

"The piercing truth of it ; I can't read it ; it's too sad, too vividly true. That surge and moan, that tragedy of human existence, they felt it all thousands of years ago. Is it never to end?"

He went to the window and drew aside the blind. The dawn was coming up, breezy and smokeless, picking out steeple and dome in the squalid huddle of houses, bringing to the many-spotted congestion of the maleficent city a hint of the fragrance of waving woods, and the purity of dew-drenched meadows. From the east, welling luminously with the life of a new day, he turned, thinking of the young life already trembling on the ebb-tide—and behold the grey stricken face of Jim in the doorway.

"They want you again," Mr. Dalrymple whispered, and nodding sorrowfully, the doctor went in once more.

As he entered Peter'j'n suddenly spread out his tiny hands, feeling desperately for something, as one feels in darkness and distress. With a smothered cry his mother caught them, and at her touch the expression of the thin, drawn face changed magically. Opening his eyes very wide, as one entranced by what he sees, Peter'j'n smiled radiantly; his lips, too, moved as in love and assurance, but there came no sound, save the gentle breathing of a sigh. Stooping quickly, the man of science passed an unseen hand over the little heart, then tenderly kissed the little face, again relaxed and rounded to a childish softness. Stepping forward on tiptoe, Mr. Dalrymple likewise kissed it; then in a deep silence both men withdrew, shutting the door behind them.

CHAPTER XLV

A LAST MEETING

AS MR. DALRYMPLE took a dejected turn on the platform before entering his train a figure glided out of the raw, bleak dusk, and saluted him with a cry of gladness. It was Miry. By chance she had learned how the sands were running with Mr. Emmet, and she was expending her reserve cash in the hope of looking once again upon the man for whom it would be an honour and a gratification to die, if such vicarious sacrifice could avail.

"Maybe I can't see him after all," she told Mr. Dalrymple, in the manner of one who knows disappointment and the folly of longing.

"If it's possible I'll take care you shall see him, Miry," Mr. Dalrymple earnestly assured her; and Miry's eyes were warmer with gratitude than if he made her a gift of a new hat crowned by the biggest ostrich plume in London.

Though little given to talk when private feelings were concerned, she opened her heart on the journey telling marvellous tales of the sick man's goodness,

the love he inspired, the magical influence he shed. "'Minded one of Daniel in the lions' den," she said; "went anywhere, did anything, so long's it would help. 'E oughter 'ave married, sir," she went on, giving a woman's best proof of interest. "An' then 'e'd 'ave somebody to look arter 'im, an' not let 'im kill 'imself for 'em as don't deserve it. An' she'd be a lucky woman as got 'im, I can tell 'e, sir. Now 'e can't marry nor come back to us no more for ever. Oh! I wonder 'ow the good God that you an' 'im told us about, sir, allows it. I wouldn't, if I could 'elp it. Seems all the best must die. S'pose you know, sir, as little Peter'j'n's dyin' too."

He regarded her an instant in a pained compassion; then returned very slowly:

"No, Miry, Peter'j'n's not dying."

A look of startled intelligence came into Miry's face. "Gone?" she said, bending unconsciously towards him.

"Went this morning," answered Mr. Dalrymple, "just as the sun was rising to light him on his way."

Miry drew in her breath sharply, and he could see the tears welling in her honest, fearless eyes.

"In that cellar in Vernal Avenue?" she asked.

"No, in my room, Miry, and you needn't be sorry. He went smiling and happy."

"I wanted to be with him at the last," she said, her lip trembling. "Poor little Peter'j'n, 'e ought never to 'ave come our way."

From that point they talked little, both being too

full of their own thoughts for speech. Besides, they were friendly enough to enjoy a sympathetic silence.

At their destination they found what one at least expected to find—a household silent and subdued, but without oppressive dolour, a room gleaming with sunshine, and Mr. Emmet lying serenely like a soldier taking rest after battle. At sight of Mr. Dalrymple the worn face lighted with pleasure, and two thin hands were held out in welcome. "Ah! you are as good as ever," was the greeting; "come close to me, close, close. There, there. You see how perverse I am, giving my friends trouble by lying down to die away from home."

"I hope not," returned Mr. Dalrymple, trying to disregard the evidence of the deathly face. "A little rest, a little quiet, and you'll be back with us again."

Mr. Emmet smiled fondly as at a pious fiction, a charitable make-believe. "You and I were always frank with each other, Dalrymple," he said in a low voice. "Let us be franker than ever now—if that be possible—when I've only a very little while left. I was just thinking as you came how wondrously time abridges and slips into eternity. You remember Carlyle's remark, Time, with his moods and tenses, what a miraculous entity he always is! When we're young the years are interminable: then as we advance they go faster and faster, until at last they speed like a hurricane, sweeping us with them, and landing us—here."

He paused for breath, and Mr. Dalrymple, moved

by pity and brotherly feeling, made some remark meant to be encouraging.

"Oh, don't imagine," was the smiling response, "that it's half so bad lying here as you well and strong people seem to think. If it were, what would your professions and mine be worth? My dear Dalrymple, we are all mere ephemera. One only remaineth, and it is well, very well. It's perfectly natural this, this crossing of the bridge without lights—a momentary darkness, an instant's holding of the breath, perhaps, and then everlasting day, then the great glory and the shout of welcome from the host gone before. Think of it, Dalrymple! and don't wonder if sometimes I long to be gone. The only thing I regret is that I must leave my work, and so little done. When the Master meets me I shall be ashamed."

"Others will render testimony that will not be for shame," said Mr. Dalrymple, his face quivering.

"The true, loyal-hearted Dalrymple speaks there," responded Mr. Emmet. "Jopling gave me a great scolding—you know what for. But even if he were right I have no cause to complain. They crucified our Master, Dalrymple; they haven't done that to me. But there—there, I vex and sadden you. Tell me, how go things about St. Emmanuel and the Scots mission? Ah! that I could go just once more among my people—with a last, a parting advice. You'll give them my love, Dalrymple, and the love of Him who sent both you and me."

He asked many questions, inquiring after this person and that with perfect clearness and composure of mind. All at once he asked for Peter'j'n. Now Mr. Dalrymple had decided to say nothing of Peter'j'n, and instructed Miry to that effect; but to the direct question he must needs return a direct answer, especially as Mr. Emmet was regarding him with eyes of preternatural keenness. So, as gently as might be, he told how it was with Peter'j'n. To his surprise and relief Mr. Emmet heard the news as an intending traveller might hear of a friend who has just gone the way he is himself about to travel.

"Ah! and he's ahead of me," was the response. "I thought I should be first. Well! it'll be one more face to greet me on my arrival. The little Peter'j'n, the brave little heart! Many a time mine was sore for him. He'll always be young now—and beautiful. How odd that I should have been thinking of him not an hour ago, and of his father and mother. It's a wrench for them, poor things. I was also thinking of Miry. Tell me, how is Miry?"

"She is downstairs wondering if she may come up to see you," was the reply.

The dying man raised himself slightly on his elbow, a vivid joy shining in his face.

"Miry has come to see me," he said. "Now, that is exactly like Miry. Please bring her up, Dalrymple, quick. Miry should not be kept waiting where I am concerned."

Mr. Dalrymple accordingly hastened to bring her

up, and the meeting was as that of long separated lovers. Nor in truth was love lacking. In Miry's heart were respect and admiration, with something else which she would herself have been puzzled to define. In Mr. Emmet's heart were sympathy and appreciation. Man-like, he thought of the womanly qualities in relation to the Common Cause: Woman-like, she saw the Cause concretely through the individual. His ideal was service; her devotion was worship, and the effect was a sentiment warmer and more radiant than mutual esteem.

"You ain't goin' to leave us, sir," Miry said brokenly when the first moment of awe was passed. He regarded her in infinite tenderness, saying quietly, "I am going on ahead; that is all. You'll follow. Don't be distressed, Miry; come a little closer. There, that's nice. You've been a good, good girl, Miry, and a great help and inspiration to me."

"I've been a very wicked woman, sir," blurted Miry, wiping her eyes. "Leastways I was till you got 'old of me. It's you that's good, sir."

"You have been very good, Miry, very good," he repeated. "Whoever else might stand or fail, I could always depend on you. Take my belated thanks."

Miry would again have disclaimed all merit; but being speechless, she snatched up his hand and pressed it to her lips, her tears, for the first time in sight of man, falling unchecked. For the patient's sake Mr. Dalrymple would have intervened; but Mr. Emmet made a sign to refrain.

"Miry," he said next moment, looking up into the face of the weeping woman, "when you like one very, very much, you're not content with kissing his hand, are you? A parting kiss, Miry."

And almost before the words were uttered, she had stooped and kissed him passionately on the mouth. At that undreamed-of liberty she would have fled in shame and confusion had he not detained her. There came a swift spasm of pain, and Miry, with a handkerchief already saturated, wiped the cold sweat from his brow. The spasm passed, and he smiled as before.

"Thank you," he murmured faintly. "It comes like that—and—and leaves me gasping." And then after a pause, looking from Miry to Mr. Dalrymple, "Please sit down near me—both of you. That's it, that's it. Miry, I have one last request to make, and it's this—that you go on helping Mr. Dalrymple as you helped me—in the great cause—the cause of humanity. The world needs more women like you, Miry. Please go on, and you'll find Mr. Dalrymple worthier of your aid than ever I was. They need giants in the slums, and I was always a weakling."

When Miry promised with bent head and a choking voice, a look of profound content came into Mr. Emmet's face.

"Good, good," he murmured. "Remember, I shall be watching, and—who knows?—I may be able to lend a helping hand—invisibly."

"I shall always remember you, sir," sobbed Miry, "and all you've done for me—always—always."

"Till we meet again, Miry, and then it won't be any effort to remember. God bless you. Now, Dalrymple, I think that is all. Will you read to me?"

"What shall I read?" asked Mr. Dalrymple, his voice shaking.

"In the volume of God's love there's so much that it's hard to choose. But read to me what your mother used to read to you: judged by her son, she was a good woman." So a little huskily Mr. Dalrymple read:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? . . . Nay, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

"What did I tell you?" said the sick man, with a look of ineffable happiness. "Trust a mother's heart where her boy is concerned. Nothing shall separate us, nothing—nothing. Dalrymple, give me your hand—and yours too, Miry. Nothing shall separate us; that's the assurance to say hail and farewell on——"

And holding the hands of these tried and strangely contrasted friends, he lay back breathing softly, like one in perfect peace after long strife.

CHAPTER XLVI

TWO PAGEANTS

"I THINK," cried Mrs. Cadwallader Roy in renewed consultation with B. B., "I really think the world is going to pieces. Mr. Emmet dead, little Peter'j'n dead, both to my mind as unmistakably murdered as if it were a case for the coroner and the criminal assize; and then, top of all—this dreadful thing about Asaph and Rachel. Briscoe Bunting, can't you tell me what's to be done?"

Her brother's wilfulness was an added cause of perturbation. For when the situation was put to him, and a judicious line of conduct suggested, Asaph flung out with the retort that he would go his own way though all the drawing-rooms in London should be closed against him, and gossips should blister their tongues talking scandal. His sister, having a livelier appreciation of social responsibilities, remonstrated vehemently.

"You cannot," she told him, "you must not; you don't realise what it means. I could never hold up my head again. And I am sure Rachel would rather die than consent, if she knew."

But a young man in love is as blind to side issues as a horse in blinkers. The enchanted Asaph, looking straight before him, saw but the prize on which he had set his heart. What cared he for disclosures, and the tattle of quidnuncs and busybodies? No more than for the idle buzzing of flies. Hence it was with a curdling decision he replied:

"The person who tries to enlighten Rachel at this particular juncture will be no friend of mine. This is my business, Lena, and I intend to manage it in my own way. Outside interference will be taken as impertinence and treated accordingly. I have indicated as much to Bunting."

Thus matters stood when there came the intelligence that Mr. Emmet's ordeal was over. It closed exactly forty-eight hours after the short, sharp battle of Peter'j'n, and affected Mrs. Cadwallader Roy with an emotion that surprised her friends, and perhaps astonished herself on reflection. There may have been a subtler feeling than they or she suspected, for this fighter who ended in seeming defeat was glorified by the qualities which a woman most adores—courage, chivalry, devotion, absolute forgetfulness of self, absolute loyalty to an ideal, with the charm of a magic personality superadded. Sometimes, in thinking of him, her heart beat slowly and pensively; sometimes quickly and ardently.

She even dreamed romantic dreams of what she would do when the appropriate moment arrived, how she would use part of her abounding riches to

aid this knight of the Cross in his humble noble work. For Mrs. Cadwallader Roy presented the singular anomaly of a woman of fashion with a heart for altruism. In reflective moments she was puzzled and depressed by the old problem of getting the camel through the needle's eye. It was so hard to harmonise social exigency and individual aspiration, to adjust the claims of society and humanity with any satisfaction to conscience. And this man, this comforter of the miserable, this uplifter of the fallen, was finding her a way. Again and again, she had told herself, that if Jesus were to return to earth, He would assuredly take the helper of the oppressed by the hand with a *well done, good and faithful servant;* and her woman's heart thrilled rapturously at the thought of sharing even a reflection of that glory.

In the last days there reached her a message of thanks and farewell, written, she said, recalling Carlyle's words, "As in star fire and immortal tears." With many touching expressions of gratitude Mr. Emmet commended to her the great work of saving the trampled, and hoped that the kindness she had always shown to him would be continued to his big brother, who might be better able to profit by it. "Do you know," he wrote, "I have a fancy that the world will ultimately be saved by woman. Go on, then, and prosper; though I cannot be with you in the body, be sure I shall not be forgetful nor indifferent. Tell your brother and Mr. Bunting that my thoughts

often go out to them. Oh, that I could utter what I feel concerning you all! Some day, when we poor mortals find utterance for what is in our hearts, I will tell you. God bless you; He will, if my word can avail. Farewell—farewell."

"Farewell," she murmured with trembling lips and put the letter carefully away among her sacred treasures.

The region of St. Emmanuel, honourably distinguished for its fine taste in obsequies, enjoyed the sensation of two funeral pageants which set a new standard of magnificence. For Mrs. Cadwallader Roy took care that alike in the case of Mr. Emmet and Peter'j'n, the last rites should accord with her own sense of fitness.

All Beulah Place and most of Vernal Avenue laid business aside to do final honour to Peter'j'n. Moreover, the hearse had gigantic plumes, the most splendid and impressive procurable in all the neighbourhood; the tiny coffin was a smother of flowers; and there was such a line of mourning carriages that irreverent strangers paused to ask what grandee's funeral had lost itself in the slums? In the first carriage Miry sat with Jim, Chris, and Mr. Dalrymple; next came Mr. Pickens, Dolf, and the Glasgow man, with a large following of Mr. Pickens's particular friends, who considerately made holiday for the occasion. Sal, who had not been invited, watched with a company of congenial spirits at a street

corner, and derided the absurd extravagance over a "dead kid." She had not buried hers with wasteful trappings of woe, well knowing that the money could be better expended in other ways—buying gin, for example. Dolf waved his hand grandly to her from his carriage window, a filial act of condescension which moved her to inquire wrathfully of the world at large, What things were coming to anyway, when upstart nippers rode in carriages like lords, while their despised mothers were abandoned to be kicked like old boots on the pavement? An observant friend called her attention to Mr. Pickens, who omitted to glance her way, and Sal's face flamed furiously.

"'Spose it's 'long of Miry 'e's goin'," the friend suggested thoughtfully. "Reckon 'e's sweet on 'er yet. Wot yer proposin' to do 'bout it?"

It was a nice problem, especially as the prior owner of Sal's esteemed affections had for some time been at liberty, and was understood to cherish the intention of calling to inquire into her conduct during the period of his retirement. To clarify thought, perhaps also to brace for any ordeal Fate might have in store, the company adjourned to the Cherry Tree, where, in a highly critical and indeed in an excited state of mind, they discussed the spectacle of Peter'j'n's funeral procession, precisely as if it were a circus or a Lord Mayor's show, with caustic comments on the looks and manners of the mourners.

But the grand sensation came in the pomp of Mr. Emmet's final departure. A bishop preached the

funeral sermon, dwelling with fit rhetoric on the virtues of "our departed brother," and the loss the Church had sustained by his untimely death.

As the Church declined for the most part to notice his existence while he lived, this poignant sense of deprivation might puzzle simple minds. The bishop, however, made it all clear and proper, according to the apostolic injunction to do everything decently and in order. Anything more decent or more strictly in order than that funeral sermon could not be imagined or desired. But what touched the people most was the brief simple tribute of the dead man's Nonconformist comrade.

"I knew him and loved him," said Mr. Dalrymple, with no rhetoric nor indeed a very clear utterance, "and I will say no more than this, that the better I knew him the more my love increased."

And thus prompted, the whole under-world of St. Emmanuel poured out its feelings with a strange, moving emotion. Many a hard face was wet with tears of genuine grief; many a creature of the night, many a jail bird, many a social wreck, spoke with a lump in the throat. Captains of the dark battalion kept guard while the body of their beloved lay in state, and when the funeral cortége left St. Emmanuel, the mightiest concourse that ever filled those dismal streets gathered in sorrowful farewell. Many followed to see the coffin in the train. For after the fitful fever of the slums, Mr. Emmet was returning to sleep with his fathers in his own quiet green

Kerry, far from the raving Babylon that had taken his life.

"Och, be the powers, then!" exclaimed a compatriot of his own, the same who had essayed in vain to dance a jig in the street for "a toothful" to cheer her heart. "Och! and wouldn't he be the proud, proud man this day if he could just see his own funeral. The loikes av that's worth livin' for an' dyin' for. 'Tis a pity his rivirence had no wake."

"For sake av the potheen, mother," remarked Constable O'Ryan, who was keeping order in a crowd that had no thought of disorderliness.

"Oh, get along wid ye!" was the gleaming retort. "An' will ye be afther tellin' me what's betther for the cramp, an' the cowld, an' the rheumatiz, an' the short brathin', an' the ache in owld bones, than just a thimbleful av that same?"

"Especially when the thimble has no bottom," responded Tim, quietly. "Well, ye may raise the keening, mother, for he's goin' from ye now that ye'll be missin' sore."

"Ochone, an' it's the true word yer spakin', Peeler dear!" was the response. "*Gille machree, gille machree*; God rest his sowl, he's off to the land I can never see, though it's wishin' I am that I was there this minute wid me kindred. Worra worra, an' it's sore, sore the heart of me is this day." She held out her tattered arms as though imploring the dead man to come back. "Soggarth Aroon," she cried, "was there ever the loikes av you among mortal men and

women since the blissed St. Patrick went to heaven? —Young wid the young, owld wid the owld, gay with the glad, sorrowful wid the grievin', a doctor to the sick, a feeder of the hungry, an' the frind av everybody that needed help. An' the fiends here killed you, that's God's own truth, *mo buchail*, they killed you."

She turned away, her grimy, furrowed face streaming, and there came from the listeners a sound as of moaning remorse and anger.

At the station, when the train was almost due to start, Miry pressed suddenly forward and threw a bunch of flowers on the coffin, as if bestowing a keepsake against the next meeting. It rested not unfitly on a superb crown of immortelles which bore the card of Mrs. Cadwallader Roy. When at last the door was closed, and the train moved off, Miry stood a minute gazing after it with misty eyes; then turned and walked swiftly away.

In the dusk, some hours later, she met Pickens near the Scots mission, and pressed him to go in with her.

"Another time, Miry," he answered, like one who regrets he has pressing business on hand. "To-morrow—any time—after to-night."

Miry scraped the pavement with the toe of her boot, then as under a sudden impulse she looked up.

"Chawley," she said with a thrilling earnestness, "I want you to promise me something—I want you to——"

She paused as if afraid of her own request.

"To wot?" asked Chawley, his heart leaping.

"To give up this sort of life," said Miry in a low voice. "You know wot Mr. Emmet that we saw off to-day said about livin' proper?"

"Yes, I know," returned Chawley uncomfortably. "Got an appointment for to-night," he added, as if cutting off any suggestion of present compliance.

"Must you keep it, Chawley?"

"Honour bound," replied Chawley. "That's straight—see ye to-morrow, Miry, 'bout this time; s'long," and he passed into the night.

With a sigh of foreboding Miry turned heavily into the Scots mission.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE SATIRE OF THE IMMORTALS

TRUE at once to his instincts and his interests, Meckles diligently watched the press for that eventful piece of news which his master had told him to expect; and, as usual, vigilance had its reward. "My stars," cried Mr. Meckles excitedly one morning, waving his newspaper in the air, "There it is, sure as fire burns, there it is. 'E's gone and done it this time 'E 'as—whew!" He read the item again carefully, lest there might be some trick in it (Meckles was for ever on his guard against tricks), and then, having no reason to doubt, he whistled with peculiar significance.

Unquestionably Mr. Herstein had gone and "done it"—done it, too, in a very remarkable and characteristic fashion. The Greeks got to Troy by dint of trying, and Mr. Herstein imitated the Greeks—with results at least equally surprising. After long, unequal strife against the manifold forces of hardship, opposition, and prejudice, he had achieved what in the beginning critics and prophets alike would have ridiculed as

impossible. Mr. Herstein had had his fair share of ridicule among the whips and scorns of time, yet never bated a jot of heart or purpose. Those who ridiculed did not understand that vital compound of will, tenacity, patience, shrewdness, and the faculty of minding the main chance, as he understood it, and consequently lacked his clear faith.

"I notice," remarked Mr. Herstein once, in a musing mood, "that things have a habit of turning out exactly as I expected." They belong to the inner court of fortune who can say that. The majority, scrambling for the crumbs which meet the passing need, never so much as perceive what the sentiment implies. It was because Mr. Herstein was among the knowing ones that he found himself with yet another great ambition fulfilled. For every newspaper of importance in London announced that Mr. Israel Herstein had been unanimously elected Governor of the Standard Metropolitan Bank; "a post," added the omniscient press, "for which his unique experience in finance admirably qualifies him." The new Governor enjoyed that hackneyed jest with a fresh and subtle relish. Bless their guileless hearts! They were right, though in a sense they little guessed. Mr. Herstein smiled, thinking that, on the whole, there are worse evils than a little ignorance on the part of daily historians, and proceeded calmly on his way.

The art of impressing the world lies in a proper sense of the dramatic, or melo-dramatic, as need

runs. The point was now gained at which a judicious celebration of the favours of Heaven would at once serve the ends of policy and gratify the private feeling. Wherefore, with Scriptural examples in his mind's eye, Mr. Herstein resolved to mark his elevation according to the best traditions of City orthodoxy; that is to say, he gave a choice little dinner to a score or so of the great artificers of finance, selected with an admirable eye to usefulness. With their hearts expanding about the mahogany, one might spy out weaknesses, study idiosyncrasies, and possibly learn something of ideals and lines of conduct. In any case, there would be planting and watering, and the whole would pleasantly celebrate victory.

The other guests were severely restricted to the inner circle of friends. Asaph was present, representing the interests of Savoury and Son, and, somewhat incongruously perhaps, that other tenderer interest of which we know; Potts, in all the splendour of much fine linen and diamond studs, represented the American syndicate that was expected to yield a double profit—one for the bank, and one for the Governor; B. B. came merely as a private individual, full of strange thoughts concerning the course of events. Sir Sydney Dormer attended as a matter of course, with a cluster of brother directors; and Mrs. Cadwallader Roy kept Rachel in countenance. But when the few had dined the many gathered in rustling magnificence to a post-prandial

reception held by Rachel under the ægis of her brilliant philosopher and friend.

The Herstein mansion had never before shone so resplendently as on that crowning night; never symbolised or illustrated so gratefully the glory of its master. And the fates decreed, as they so often decree for heroes and conquerors, that his triumph should coincide dramatically with the fall or removal of enemies. Oftener than he could remember, Mr. Herstein had had the felicity to see opponents and objectors swept out of his path as by providential intervention. The old good fortune was attending him still. The train which bore Mr. Emmet away had scarcely got beyond the London smoke when the *élite* of finance were gathering in congratulation. The tribute of their presence when the time came, the honoured doing honour, the successful celebrating success, was the most intoxicating Mr. Herstein had ever received.

As he looked round the splendid assembly, thinking what it meant, an ineffable bliss, as of the consummation of all desire, glowed through his being. At last the long, obscure toil was over; the fighter had emerged victorious upon the scene of dazzling brilliancy, of costly music, and delicious compliment. And it was the sweeter that the triumph belonged to Rachel also. As his eyes followed her flitting to and fro in gay animation, the object of boundless admiration and homage, his heart swelled with pride. It was a great moment, and greatly Mr. Herstein enjoyed it.

He moved through the buzzing throng cooing affably, pleased and eager to please, and while he chatted and smiled, there revolved in his intricate brain many thoughts and feelings little suspected by his guests. Even then, he forgot nothing that was worth remembering.

"Ah!" he remarked to Mrs. Cadwallader Roy as they paused a moment together, "I see your friend Mr. Emmet has gone."

His manner was full of sympathy and politeness, but his heart said lyrically, "Another obstacle out of the way; another meddler well rid of."

"Yes," Mrs. Cadwallader Roy returned, "he's gone. Too good for the slums, I suppose, Mr. Herstein."

Mr. Herstein smiled ambiguously.

"Do you think so?" he said. "Well, it is a peety when good men die. But he leaves a disciple. Mr. Dalrymple will no doubt carry on the work."

"Oh, no doubt," she replied, with a meaning look.

For her thoughts of that crowded magnificence were not as his thoughts. She came in a doubt which the grandeur and gaiety did not diminish. To-morrow the sword might fall and turn all this to a tragic mockery. She looked at Rachel, and was filled with pity; she looked at Mr. Herstein, and was filled with a wondering awe. Had he no secret misgiving? Did he never glance up furtively for any sign of the hand of doom writing on the wall? If the hand wrote its mystic warning, Mr. Herstein was blind. Nothing disturbed his peace;

everything ministered to his gratification. Those who had once held aloof were glad to be his guests. The best were gracious, and many burned the incense of the courtier.

"Ha! ha!" thought Mr. Herstein, "the Governor of a big bank has many favours to bestow, many privileges to grant."

Well! he knew one who would make the most of them, who would take care that no favour was bestowed, no privilege allowed, without adequate compensation. As a man long accustomed to the sordid commonplaces of life, Mr. Herstein at times paused, asking himself whether the subtle adulation were not the glorious unreality of a dream from which he should presently awake in disappointment. Then, again, his mind wandered to the past, and some he had encountered by the way. By natural association he thought specially of him who, as the gay throng chattered and laughed, was speeding to his long home. Mr. Herstein had too much sense, too lucid an appreciation of the event which happeneth unto all, to exult in the death of an enemy; but the contrast between the dark silence of his severest critic and his own blaze of glory that evening struck him—not unpleasantly.

The ship which conveyed Mr. Emmet homeward under his black pall was already more than half way across the Irish Channel when the company began to break up. The leave-taking was mostly an elegant formality; but when Mrs. Cadwallader

Roy kissed Rachel a kind of throttling emotion came over her. She burned to speak, to draw the gleaming, unconscious girl aside and tell her what was impending. In truth, she hung a moment as on the dizzy act; but someone interrupted, and impulse and opportunity passed together, as so often happens in the crises of existence. Looking back in the light of after events, she often wondered whether things would have been different had she spoken then, as her heart prompted.

The last of the guests to go were Mr. Potts and B. B., and, as particular friends, the host saw them forth himself. As he stood on the doorstep, outlined against the light behind, a man paused in his walk on the other side of the street, gazed an instant like a traveller noting a wayside incident, and resumed his progress. Mr. Herstein remained perhaps three minutes drinking the cool night air, though it was not untainted by fog. Then the last carriage and the last policeman on duty having departed, he turned back and shut the door.

"I congratulate you on a perfect triumph," he said, meeting Rachel a moment later.

"Oh, I'm not vain enough to think the triumph was mine," she responded radiantly. "It was yours, father, and I'm so glad—so glad!"

"It was yours too, my child," he rejoined tenderly —"yours more than mine, and that's what pleases me most. Rachel, they have come as we desired to see them coming, and done as we desired they should

do. Israel is not forgotten. He is planted among the Gentiles like a tree, even a cedar of Lebanon, and spreads his roots and flourishes. The promise endureth. My child, think of that. There now, sweet you must be fatigued; go to your dreams and your sleep. My beloved, good-night, good-night."

She kissed him fondly and went off, happy in her youth, her success, her love, never thinking that skies can darken and crash suddenly.

In a little while the lights were out and the household at rest, all save Mr. Herstein, who paced his library in a flush of exhilaration. Presently he dropped into a chair, and a rapt, far-off expression stole into the dark, keen face. He was reviewing the past, retreading the steep, briery way by which he had ascended, at times with bleeding feet. Well, here he was at the top. He had taken the world on its own hard terms, and wrung from it—wealth and homage; he had fought the powers which oppose poverty, and brought them to heel like whipped hounds.

From the past he leaped into the future. He saw the Governor of the Standard Metropolitan Bank initiating great schemes, effecting reforms, reducing expenses, increasing profits. A lazy, overpaid staff would now have to work or go. The day of incompetency was over, for the new Governor meant not only to direct the general policy, but, Napoleon-like, supervise detail as well. A long time he sat thus in a busy, absorbed silence, planning what was to be. Then he rose, unlocked a drawer in his writing-table,

and brought out a dumpy, brass-clasped volume—his private diary.

It was a book which no eye but his own was permitted to see, a book which held many secrets, and would one day, according to the intention of its author, be committed to the fire. Meanwhile it was his confidential companion, the mute sharer in all the rigour and rapture of battle.

Methodical in everything, Mr. Herstein sat down to record particulars of the latest victory, his pen glowing with pride. He had not written more than a dozen lines when he paused over a stange noise. He listened in dead stillness, and it came again, low, furtive, but unmistakable. Laying down his pen, he went swiftly to the door, and as it opened the light fell on the masked face of a man. Mr. Herstein had never lacked courage. Like a flash he sprang, grappling the intruder, and, by design or accident, jerked him into the library, at the same time trying to pull off the mask. The other wrenched and tore to get free, but Mr. Herstein's fingers held like clevis-bolts.

"Let go, you fool," muttered a rough voice, which Mr. Herstein had heard before, though he did not recognise it now. His response was to thrust up his hand and clutch the mask, half-revealing the face beneath.

"I'll have you," he panted; "you villain, I'll have you!" But even as he spoke the murderous blow descended, and with a gurgling, long-drawn cry, he sank a huddled heap on the floor.

CHAPTER XLVIII

REVELATIONS OF A PRIVATE DIARY

IN a moment the terrified servants were about him with cries of "robbery" and "murder." Rachel came breathlessly in dressing-gown and slippers, her long black hair shaken down her back, an image of quivering dismay. Catching sight of a trickle of blood on the carpet, she dropped on her knees and lifted the wounded head. "Father," she cried distractedly, "speak to me—speak to me." But as he made no response she turned an ashy face to those pressing helplessly about her. "The doctor!" she said; "quick, quick!—and the police! Run, oh, run!"

The police came promptly, but the masked man had not awaited their arrival; in the confusion he had escaped like a ghost or a shadow, none hindering. The family physician followed soon after the police, and Mr. Herstein was carried to his bed-room breathing stertorously. The doctor examined the wound carefully and looked grave.

"I'm afraid it's serious, Miss Herstein," he said; "I should like advice," and named a noted surgeon.

"Of course, do or get what you wish," Rachel replied anxiously; and within half an hour the specialist was bending over the unconscious form in the bed. With quiet celerity he touched and pried, making no remarks, asking no questions. Then the two men of science retired by themselves to another room, Rachel remaining crouched beside her father.

"Will he live?" asked the family physician.

"Yes, I think he may live," was the reply. "But I question whether he'll do any more work—at any rate, work depending on intellect. You saw what has happened to the brain. I don't like these effusions. However, we'll see what trephining will do."

"It will be a terrible blow to his poor daughter," said the physician, in whom a family practice kept the emotions tender. The surgeon made no answer. His daily experience was to see men and women staggering from precisely such blows, and on what he could not help he had ceased to comment. But as time pressed, he asked who was to take over the case.

"Will you please do it?" returned the physician. "I will take the responsibility of deciding on Miss Herstein's behalf."

"Very well," said the surgeon; "we'll get it done at once. Ring up two surgical nurses, please," he added, giving the address of a nursing institution. "And while you're doing that, I'll comfort the young lady."

When he returned, Rachel met him with pitiful inquiries.

"You'll save his life, won't you, doctor?" she said, laying a trembling hand on the surgeon's arm: "say you'll save his life."

"Yes," replied the surgeon; "I am glad to tell you, Miss Herstein, that I think we can save his life."

"Thank God!" cried Rachel, tears of relief and gratitude starting to her eyes. "Oh, thank God! thank God for that!"

It was explained to her that a slight operation was necessary, and that to make all comfortable for the patient, two trained nurses would presently arrive.

She assented gratefully and eagerly; nay, she urged haste, for in her affrighted condition delay seemed only a shade less dreadful than death. He forbore to tell her what would follow; sufficient for the hour is the evil thereof.

Science did its utmost to counteract the effects of the burglar's jemmy, and Mr. Herstein opened his eyes and looked round doubtfully. It was found then that he had no remembrance of the assault, could give no account of the assailant, that in fact all memory of recent events was gone. Moreover, with fresh pangs of dismay, Rachel noticed that the simplest question brought a look of pained vacuity to his face, as if the mind were vainly groping in the dark, or trying to grasp shadows. Privately, this loss of intelligence distressed her to bursts of frantic weeping; but before others she bore up with the rare courage she owed to the stricken man, saying in her engaging,

confident way, that as his strength returned his mind would regain its old force and clearness.

Doctors and nurses nodded sympathetically, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy and other personal friends joining in the humane deceit. For the rest they discussed the audacity, resource, and marvellous elusiveness of the criminal. If that gentleman was in the least given to vanity, he must have been tickled by the sensation of his exploit, and the startling theories of which it was the primary cause. Indeed, had he cared to disclose himself, excited crowds would have flocked to catch a glimpse of his face. Such is the interest in heroes. But with the modesty of his kind, he preferred to remain unknown, and it seemed that not all the ingenuity of Scotland Yard could drag him into the fierce light that beats on a criminal court.

The first wild current of excitement was still thrilling the public when Pickens met Miry near the Scots mission according to appointment. As usual he was jocose and self-possessed. Miry, on the other hand, was sorely perturbed. Rather by compulsion than choice she referred to the event that was on all tongues, remarking that the "'tecs" were exploring Vernal Avenue for the man who did the deed.

"So I 'ear," returned Pickens calmly. "An' looks as if it might be a scraggin' job if 'e was copped. Oh! that 'minds me," he added, in the tone of one relating a good jest. "'Eard a good thing to-day. Beulah Place is sold to your Yankee friend, Mr.

Buntin,' an' 'pears 'e bought it from this man that's been knocked on the 'ead. Owned Vernal Avenue as well, so that all us poor blokes as was bled for rent was 'is tenants. Wot d'ye think of that? Owner of Vernal Avenue livin' in a palice. Pretty, ain't it? All come out through the messin' an' goin' on of 'is collector. Talk of a bear with a sore 'ead. Why, it 'ain't in it with Meckles to-day. Says 'e arranged to start landlord on 'is own 'ook, an' 'e meant to be so kind to tenants—no chuckin' out—no twistin' of the screw—nothin' to 'urt the feelin's—an' now somebody's gone an' spoiled everything by lettin' the old cove 'ave it on the nut. I calls it 'ard lines on Meckles."

He laughed, but Miry stared in amazement.

"Herstein owner of Vernal Avenue and Beulah Place," she said, like one discrediting her ears. "Wot next?" It was on her tongue to say that he "jolly well deserved" his fate, whoever the instrument might be, but the occasion was too serious, her feelings were too closely engaged.

"Chawley," she said softly, her mind revolving about the personal question, "ain't got no idear, I s'pose, who done it?"

"Didn't expect you to be fishin' in that pond, Miry," was the reply.

"No, no," she protested, flushing like one caught in a dishonourable act, "not fishin', Chawley, s'elp me Gawd, not fishin'."

"Don't you go an' think as I don't trust 'e," Pickens

rejoined fervently. "But if we was to speak 'ere, the very stones might peach."

"I didn't mean to be askin' questions, Chawley—only——"

"Well?" said Pickens.

"Oh! I don't know," Miry returned in confusion. "I can't explain myself. But you remember, Chawley, what you promised?"

"I remember," he returned. "But one or two things 'as to be attended to, so that it ain't just quite convenient at present to turn in 'an pay my respects to Mr. Dalrymple. But I like 'im, I do. 'E's a good sort—best that's made—an' that's a fact. So was little St. Patrick. An' don't you think as I'm goin' to forget my promise, Miry. 'Tain't my style."

Miry was torn by a wild contention between the mission worker with a keen sense of responsibility, and the woman with a nameless yearning. The woman it was who won.

"Mr. Dalrymple ain't 'ere to-night," she said, trying to look as if the statement meant nothing in particular. "Gone to Ireland to see Mr. Emmet tucked away; an' I'm in charge."

Chawley's pulses began to quicken.

"An' ready to attend to out-patients," he returned with well-feigned jocularity. "Well, come to think of it, I don't know as an hour's mission would do a cove any 'arm; an' if there's anything you think I should be good for, Miry, why, 'ere goes."

Two hours he remained—busy, animated, eventful

hours. Representatives of the law looked in, eyed him curiously, and would have asked questions, but for a knowledge of the utter futility of the enterprise. Doubtless they were full of fine theories and moral certainties, frustrated, alas! by a wicked and too clever world; doubtless also Pickens had his own philosophic thoughts concerning the comedy of human life, and the idle stratagems of police officers. But each side judiciously kept its own counsel. The law went its way with shut mouth and open, suspicious eyes; and Pickens did the behests of Miry as if his soul were devoted to works of charity.

A diversion of a different kind nearly led to effusion of blood. The Glasgow man, who was likewise attached for duty, finding Pickens in attendance, could contain his rage no longer. Red as fire with jealousy, he told himself the time had come when a man of honour and spirit should know precisely how he stood in his lady's affections. To which end he resolved either to call on Miry to choose on the spot whom she would have, or to invite the interloper to a quiet spot at the back, where, on the arbitrament of the fists, it should be decided who was to be winner. It took all Miry's tact and authority (aided, perhaps, by Chawley's goodnatured contempt) to preserve peace.

"Look 'ere, Dave," she said succinctly, "if you want to be chucked, you'll go a'ead an' make a fool of yourself, same's yer doin'. It won't take ye long. If Mr. Dalrymple was at 'ome 'e wouldn't stand no

rowin' 'ere—take my word for that—an' the rules ain't changed when 'e's away."

Whereupon Dave collapsed not very graciously.

"All right, Miry," he returned sullenly, "all right; you just please yourself."

"Now don't you go an' take on like a blazin' idjit, cos there's work to be done, an' no time for foolin'," she rejoined. "Wot I want to-night is your 'elp, d'ye understand? An' wot I says to you, Dave, I says to Chawley."

"Good for you, Miry," cried Chawley; and Dave could do no less than echo the cry of acquiescence.

As she went to and fro about her own work she sometimes glanced furtively at the pair, smothering a sigh. Ah! if only the Fates decreed things differently—if only the right man—but Miry knew the vanity of indulging fatuous thoughts.

Meanwhile, a scene even more trying to those concerned was taking place elsewhere. Rachel had unexpectedly sent a message of exquisite misery to Mrs. Cadwallader Roy—"Come to me at once. I am in despair. Oh, this is dreadful!"

"Is your father worse, dear?" Mrs. Cadwallader Roy asked, instantly obeying the summons.

"It is good of you to come—so quickly," was the choking reply. "Father is not worse; neither is he better. Dear Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, he will never be well again, and it would be best if he and I died together." In a sudden flood of tears she threw her

arms about the elder woman's neck. "I'm so miserable"—she sobbed piteously—"so miserable; and I don't know what to do."

Patting the bent head and murmuring words of comfort, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy waited until the paroxysm should pass. Her feminine wit suspected there was more here than grief for a father's illness, and her mind reverted to Asaph. Had Rachel made discoveries for herself, and if so, how? Hand in hand they sat down on a corner of the sofa, and by degrees the intuition and sympathy of Mrs. Cadwallader Roy prevailed. Rachel opened her heart, and the pent feelings gushed like a torrent. She confessed her great love and her brief happiness, with so keen an edge of woe that her confidante was constrained to protest upbraidingly:

"But, dear, you speak as if it were all over."

"It is over," was the quick response. "I know and feel it is quite, quite over.

"What makes you say that, dear?" Mrs. Cadwallader Roy asked, her voice vibrating with pity and excitement.

Rachel rose, unlocked a richly carved box which she had carried into the drawing-room, and drew forth Mr. Herstein's private diary.

"That," she said tragically, holding it up, "that!"

The tale of disgrace was there, written like a last confession, by her father's hand.

CHAPTER XLIX

CRISIS AND REFORM

THE sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. Of that fateful far-reaching truth Rachel had excruciating proof, for she must now bear the appalling ignominy of the success in which her father had gloried, the success turned as by the cast of invisible dice, to a heritage of woe and shame. Twice in quick succession the angel of disaster smote the corners of her house, leaving it a crumbling ruin. The first shock seemed a wanton convulsion of the forces of wickedness, striking down the innocent and worthy; the second was as the justification of an outraged retributive Heaven. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." She remembered Who said that: and the Hebraic imagination, shrinking as at the fiery touch of a Nessus-shirt or mantle of doom, already began to suffer the tortures of retribution. With the frantic ardour of the lost Rachel recalled the past, magnifying trifles, giving to half-forgotten incidents the horrible significance of omens. She had been lolling in a fool's paradise, and for her

fatuity must go through life bearing marks of disgrace that would for ever cut her off from the rest of the world, separate her from those she loved. She saw herself a pariah, wandering from clime to clime, without home, without country, without a spot to rest in, or one friendly soul to ease her troubles.

For a little while after that tragic celebration of victory, her father absorbed her entire attention. She had picked up the diary casually, as she would have picked up any other personal article belonging to him, and put it away without thought of its contents. Day and night she was engaged in her pious duty, stealing noiselessly into her father's room, kissing his limp hand or bandaged head, interrogating nurses and doctors, suggesting comforts, answering inquiries, receiving calls of condolence. There was no time to think, nor, indeed, a clear vision to observe. But as the tumult of emotion subsided, partly from exhaustion, partly from the soothing touch of time, she began dimly to realise what the sure eye of the surgeon discerned from the first—that her father would never again be the man she had known.

The discovery brought fits of distracted weeping, and for a little she refused to believe that neither surgery nor medicine could relume the extinguished lamp of reason. To satisfy her, other brain specialists were called in. When these had come and gone, she demanded the truth without gloss or shading. On hearing it, she staggered a little like a creature

mortally crushed; but recovered as one who sets the teeth, resolved to conquer, and presently, with characteristic heroism, set herself to the task of nursing her helpless child of sixty.

In her presence none ventured to speak of imbecility, but elsewhere the unvarnished truth ran from mouth to mouth. All concerned knew that while Mr. Herstein might live, and probably would live, for years, it must be as a pitiable imbecile. The brain on which he had secretly vaunted himself, which had been so keen, so alert, so resourceful, which had so often accomplished the miraculous, was like a clock with broken, irreparable springs. So do the Immortals mock the pride of man.

Once the fact was made indubitable, Rachel took it with the fortitude of a nature capable in the last resource of taking courage from misfortune. Her eyes were, indeed, frequently wet; but her heart was unsubdued. Service was now a charge on filial love. Devotion could not be too vigilant nor sacrifice too ready for her father's sake. On this lofty sense of duty there came a rebound of feeling, almost as if her heart rejoiced in the chance of needful ministration. For a moment the cloud turned its silver lining to the light. The worst might be worse. It was indeed unspeakably touching to look at her father in his helplessness, terrible to picture the long years of martyrdom; but the thought that it was martyrdom braced and sustained, and gave affection its opportunity.

Upon this condition of mind came a terrible discovery. Picking up the diary again by chance she began to read listlessly and without expectation. She had not read many minutes when her listlessness became, first, a painful interest, and then a throbbing consternation. For it was as if in an idle moment she had stumbled upon a judgment worse than death. Misfortune was cruel, but brave hearts could endure; here was dishonour that would overwhelm. We need not pry too closely into the throes of agony. In a reeling despair, she summoned Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, opening the flood-gates of her misery, as we have seen.

"I had no idea what was going on," she moaned—"none, none whatever. Tell me, did you know?"

It was no time for a pretence of ignorance on any mistaken theory of kindness. Mrs. Cadwallader Roy owned that quite recently she had learned something which surprised and pained her exceedingly. Rachel stood a minute, winking involuntarily in the acuteness of anguish. Then, as if her knees bent under a sudden weight, she sank in a chair, convulsed by sobs, which brought no relief of tears.

In poignant concern, Mrs. Cadwallader Roy embraced the suffering girl, beseeching her with many words of endearment not to take it so much to heart. None the less her own tears came, and presently the two, locked in each other's arms, were weeping together.

Next morning Mrs. Cadwallader Roy came early,

and her first remark on meeting Rachel was, "I am afraid you have not slept, dear."

"No," answered Rachel quietly, "I haven't slept, but that doesn't matter. I have been thinking."

"And what have you been thinking, dear?"

"That as soon as father can be moved, we will leave London—at any rate, for a while. We shall both be better away."

There were vehement protests against that proposed flight; but Rachel resembled her father in one thing, that, having once resolved, she was constant to her purpose. Asaph expostulated passionately, and his manly pleading shook her; but were it only for his sake, she must adhere to her plan. Everybody was talking, the majority, she was sure, with a kind of glee, for she knew how the world revelled in scandal. Whatever, therefore, might be the pain of going, it were more than purgatory to stay. Time might befriend them; but, for the present, the things of which they had dreamed, which lately seemed so near, were far off and impossible.

"You'll not leave me without hope," Asaph implored; and looking at him as if her whole soul were in her eyes, she replied:

"No, not without hope," and broke down on the assurance.

The time of waiting until her father could be moved brought some astonishing changes. Beulah Place passed into the possession of Mr. Briscoe Bunting, who, with the eager aid of Mr. Dalrymple,

instantly set about his experiment in social evolution —the redemption of a slum. Nor was he without other ardent sympathisers and helpers. Had Mr. Herstein not lost perception and understanding, his feelings would have been torn by the treason of his own house in aiding and abetting the enemy, a treason that was consummated by an open and complete reversal of his policy in Vernal Avenue, which was not yet sold when a single blow ended all the schemes of ambition. That chequered and dubious street was indeed undergoing a magical transformation. For under what Mr. Herstein would have denounced as alien influence, there came to Rachel an idea which presently absorbed her mind—the great idea of restitution, of sheltering the despoiled, clothing the ragged, feeding the hunger-bitten without thought of rent or key-money.

"Where have you been, Rachel?" her father asked plaintively one evening; "I have missed you."

"In Vernal Avenue, father, seeing after some poor people there."

A look of perplexity came into her father's vacant face as if he were trying to recall something; then he smiled weakly, saying "Yes, yes." It was no longer of consequence or interest to Mr. Herstein that his hardly-acquired and jealously-guarded substance should be dispensed in works of charity and mercy. One shall gather and another spend; and the spender is seldom as the gatherer.

"You see, B. B.," remarked Mrs. Cadwallader Roy in discussing the situation, "the ancient truth—out of evil comes good. The destiny we name Providence works by unexpected ways to unexpected results."

"That's so," admitted B. B. reflectively. "Not many, I fancy, expected that old man Herstein should rule just a single day as Governor of his bank, and that his successor should be Sir Sydney Dormer. Lena, may I congratulate you?"

"How often have I implored you, B. B., to restrain your passion for frivolity?" she replied with a vivid flush and a light of the eye that did not give the impression of displeasure. "The present is enough for us, goodness knows. Suppose we let the future take care of itself?"

"It's pleasant to find one's friends in the path of happiness," quoth B. B. quietly.

"Do you think Rachel is happy?" asked Mrs. Cadwallader Roy, adroitly switching the talk from herself.

"Don't know," responded B. B., thoughtfully rubbing his chin. "Sometimes her face seems to give a negative to that supposition. But she's bravely doing her duty in various directions, not an easy duty, poor girl, considering what she has inherited. But despite the inflexible laws of heredity, Rachel Herstein has the right sort of heart—with nerve to back it. And there's a satisfaction in well-doing—not always the most glowing or thrilling, I grant you, but perhaps the more lasting on that account."

"As I had occasion to remark once before, how nice it is to be good, B. B.! You've been proving that, haven't you?"

"Well!" answered B. B., with a half-comical, half-serious expression, "thanks to you, my recent experiences have not been altogether on the side of regret. That's something for a man of my years and training to say. I was beginning to feel that superfluous wealth merely made a man of my stamp a sort of gilded vagabond. You've taught me it needn't be so. I've got an object at last, and, you bet, I'm going to see it through."

"Go on!" cried Mrs. Cadwallader Roy joyously; "you'll get through the needle's eye yet."

"I can see you're a little mixed in your Scripture, Lena," returned B. B. softly; "but I appreciate your good wishes and your hope. And, who knows? perhaps England's governors may one of these days wake up to a realisation of the malignant disease at her vitals. There is a nasty piece of surgery ahead of her: but it's got to be done—if she's to be saved. That's my idea. Funny and a little bit ironical that I should be in it. But an outsider can at least see how the game goes, where there is slackness and where disaster."

In the scheme of reform—the double scheme—the name of Mr. Thomas Meckles did not appear; but, as by the caprice of that fate which he had so often found satirical, Pickens was accorded a conspicuous place, chiefly by the secret influence of Miry.

To their mutual delight, these two were closely associated in work to which Chawley devoted himself none the less eagerly or efficiently that he found his own connection with it a matter of constant surprise.

In the business on which her heart was now set Rachel came much into confidential relation with Mr. Dalrymple; and more and more both relied on the unique knowledge and rare judgment of Pickens. It was observed that where Miss Herstein was concerned, Chawley had never before been so solicitous to serve a woman. Towards her, indeed, he became the very pink and model of chivalry, lying in wait to surprise her with attendance, anticipating her wishes, converting her slightest word to instant law as though by some charm or magic of her own she called forth latent unsuspected qualities. With his own hand he extracted apologies from three old "pals," all gentlemen of skill, who dared to speak of her unbecomingly; and it was known he was prepared to deal summarily with any man whose bearing to the new goddess lacked a proper reverence. Noting these things, some wondered whether in all this zeal and gallantry there might not be an element of remorse. On that point Mr. Pickens chose to hold his peace, and no one ventured to ask impertinent questions.

Mr. Dalrymple and B. B. rejoiced over such a convert and colleague; but their rejoicing was as the chill of moonlight to the deep thrilling rapture of Miry. Perhaps none quite appreciated her part in bringing that speckled sheep within the fold.

CHAPTER L

SILENT VOICES

THE going of Mr. Emmet and Peter'j'n was not to be wholly in vain. Martyrs they were, man and child alike, victims of the wrong which first sears and then kills; but if their disembodied spirits looked back, even if through a blur of tears, they must have marked with joy the issues to which their matyrdom was quickening some who remained behind; understood at last that the travail, the pain, the pangs of sorrow and love, were not altogether lost. The cankerous, devastating evil of which they had died was not indeed to be extirpated by any process so simple as the sacrifice of life. It would go on adding to its innumerable victims, slaying men, women, and children—especially children, for it is deadliest to the helpless. Avarice and extortion would still devour, increasing appetite by what they fed on, till England, in a fury of shame and indignation, should rise, like the Christian nation she pretends to be, and put an end to the barbaric cruelty of harrying and plundering.

As yet the darkness revealed but a tiny ray of light, so tiny that only the expectant eye could discern it in the smothering thickness of the nether murk. But within a very little circle the forces of justice and mercy were beginning to move, stimulated by the memory of those who were gone. When Mr. Briscoe Bunting came to close quarters with the hydra he was to attack, the enterprise seemed ridiculous by reason of its relative insignificance.

"Seems like dropping the proverbial pebble into the ocean, after all," he said dolefully. But happily Mrs. Cadwallader Roy and Rachel were by with inspiration and help.

"Don't falter because the enemy is powerful," urged Mrs. Cadwallader Roy. "Remember the animating advice to Joshua, 'Be strong, and of a good courage.'"

"And the song of Miriam," put in Rachel quietly.

"And the song of Miriam," repeated Mrs. Cadwallader Roy in a glowing enthusiasm. "If you shrink, take heart from a woman. Isn't it glorious to fight against odds? I think God took Mr. Emmet and Peter'j'n just to shake us out of our sloth and indifference, to open our eyes to the incredible, disgraceful fact that every day scores and hundreds of people are perishing in Christian nations, in England and America, from sheer mal-treatment.

"Thank you," responded B. B. "Let us go ahead," and there was no more faltering.

It did not deter the little group that they became

the objects of ridicule and contumely, that they were shouted at as fanatics, branded as meddlers, and secretly threatened by the foes of reform who prosper by extortion. As they began so they went on, doing what was possible to isolated effort in staying a monstrous evil against a time of general awakening. And as they strove each of them felt the mystic power of the silent voices and the faces that were gone. Many a joyous household owed its first experience of the decency and sanctity of family life to the leavening influence of Mr. Emmet, just as many a child owed its new dress, and its wholesome, generous dinner, and its clean, sweet crib to the memory of little Peter'j'n.

There were, moreover, more direct and personal benefits. Thus it was to his association with Peter'j'n that Dolf owed the good fortune which ended his career as a slum waif.

"Knew little boy Heath, didn't you?" Mr. Bunting incidentally asked him one day.

"Rather," answered Dolf proudly. "Should 'ave 'eard 'im yarnin' to me 'bout the country. Made out it was a kind of 'eaven."

"Wouldn't you like to go there and see if he spoke the truth?" was the next question.

"Oh, I say, mister, give a cove a chanct," laughed Dolf; but when he found that the question was serious and practical, the ragged cap went into the air.

"No relative or friend you'd hate to leave, eh?" inquired Mr. Bunting.

"None as I knows on, sir," replied Dolf quickly, "'cept Miry an' the Scotch 'un."

"Your mother, for example?"

"Oh, muver!" cried Dolf. "No apron-string a-'oldin' there. Gone an' left me. Don't know where she's took 'erself off to, more'n Adam."

"Come with me," said B. B., and they went straight to the Scots mission. A little later Dolf was going round with a grand air bidding his friends good-bye.

"Where yer off to now, Dolf?" they asked, wondering from his manner whether he had fallen heir to a vast fortune.

"To school," announced Dolf loftily. "Not one of 'em blessed places round the corner, no fear —way out in the country, where Peter'j'n used to tell us about. Ta! ta! Send ye some roses an' a bunch of 'omegrowed 'ot'ouse gripes when I get fixed up."

In fact Dolf was leaving London in the charge of Jim and Chris Heath, and at the cost of Mrs. Cadwallader Roy and Rachel, who made his education a joint concern. Should four or five years of absence fit him for the post, he was to have the corner of a desk in the house of Savoury and Son, or, if it should please him better, in the Standard Metropolitan Bank.

"And who knows," Mrs. Cadwallader Roy told him, "if you're very, very good and a little bit clever, you may one day be a great and rich

man. Wonderful things happen to boys who work hard and always do what is right. Don't forget that."

"No fear, mum," answered Dolf, his face a radiant grin.

The welfare of the Heaths was also a matter of joint interest. On the very afternoon of Mr. Herstein's celebration Jim received notice from Meckles that his cellar-rent had gone up. The event of the night stayed the tyrant's hand; and when his reign ended suddenly, the Heaths were provided with new quarters in Beulah Place, under the new landlord. But London had become to them a place of torture, a city of destruction, from which their one thought was to fly. So it was arranged they should return to their old home, taking Dolf as "a paying guest."

"I'm thinkin' a'll just be goin' north with them too," the Glasgow man remarked to Mr. Dalrymple when he heard of the arrangement. "London's no' the place I took it to be."

"Nor the London lasses just so kind as you expected, Davie?" smiled Mr. Dalrymple.

"Oh, it's no' that I've lost hope *there*, minister," returned Davie; "but atween one thing and another a'm feelin' a bit run down, and a change to a Christian place would maybe do me good. And by-and-by some folk we ken may come to their senses. I wid be sorry to see Miry throwin' hersel' away."

"Supposing the worst came to the worst, I think he's a changed man," said Mr. Dalrymple.

"Oh, is he?" snorted Davie, instantly throwing up his head. "Well, my opinion is that you may whitewash a nigger, but ye'll toil in vain tryin' to change his skin."

And on that judgment Davie went off.

When the time of departure came, Chris wept openly, and even Jim whisked away the tears, for their hearts were in the little grave which they seemed to be deserting. To comfort them Mrs. Cadwallader Roy said kindly:

"You shall come every year, in spring or summer, or both, to plant flowers on it, and in your absence be sure it will not be neglected."

"God bless you," Chris blurted, pressing a handkerchief into her eyes; "God bless and reward you."

And as if unable to say a word more, they turned quickly and went. Nor as they sped northward did they talk much or fluently, for their thoughts were behind in the cruel pagan city which had illtreated and robbed them of their treasure.

Meanwhile Rachel hastened the arrangements for taking her pitiable charge away, and it was ordained that hers was not to be the lighter lot.

THE END.

MANUKA

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